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"THERE IS ANOTHER SLIGHT IMPEDIMENT—MY WIFE HAS LEFT ME!" SAID WILFRED BROWNE, AIRILY.

## PRINCESS DOROTHY.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

DOROTHY VERNON was teacher in a large High School for Girls, her salary was a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and she lived in furnished apartments.

The rooms were much nicer than the usual run of lodgings; but then Dorothy's landlady was a gentlewoman.

The widow of a struggling surgeon, with a large family, she was thankful to let two rooms to the young teacher for fifteen shillings a week, because, as Dorothy was usually away part of the holidays, and really gave very little trouble when at home, she was, to the widow's mind, in spite of her humble payments, an ideal lodger.

Miss Vernon had been at Mayfield just over seven months. She had come there in January, it was now the first day of August. The school had broken up, in another week Miss Vernon

would be enjoying sea-breezes and country delights; but before she started on her holiday she was looking forward to a greater pleasure even than the change of scene.

Her sister, barely near relation, the one being in the world on whose love she had a claim, was coming home, and would henceforth live with her.

There were four years between them. Dorothy was twenty-two, Kathleen barely eighteen; but they were devoted to each other, and they had never been separated till the previous September. Kathleen went to a school in France, where, in consideration of her teaching English, she was received on very moderate terms.

But moderate as were these terms they had been a heavy drain on Dorothy's salary.

Now, however, Katy had done with school, and was coming home for good, the head mistress of the Thornton High School having—out of respect for her sister—agreed to give her the post of junior teacher at a salary of eighty pounds a year.

Dorothy decided they would be quite rich, and it would be perfect happiness to live together and work together.

No thought of love or lovers broke across her day dreams. She had really seen very little of men, specially young men, and when at eighteen she began to earn her own living, she had decided she was cut out for an old maid, and would pass her days in single blessedness. Yet she did not look like one destined for perpetual spinsterhood.

Dorothy was decidedly handsome. A little softening of feature and expression, and she might have been called beautiful. As it was everyone pronounced her the best-looking teacher in Thornton High School.

Tall and gracefully made, her perfectly-moulded figure was set off by a trim well-fitting gown of blue linen.

Her brown hair was plaited in a coronet round her head. She had a faultless complexion of clear red and white, and large dark brown eyes.

She carried herself well, and all her movements were full of a certain quiet dignity. Her sister had nicknamed her "Princess Dorothy," and the pet name suited her.

Miss Vernon had all her meals alone—in fact, she rarely saw Mrs. Rayne, except once a week, when she paid her rent.

The surgeon's widow was always busy. She worked far harder than Dorothy, and yet she received no payment for her labours unless it was the satisfaction of feeling she kept out of debt; and did the best she could for her nine children.

Dorothy, who detested muddle, and hated cooking, housework, and such like duties, often pitied her landlady, and thought privately a month of the widow's life would kill her, and that Mrs. Rayne must have been foolish to marry into poverty; but then, as before stated, Dorothy did not understand love affairs, and had no notion that love can gild the narrowest income.

This was the first day of Miss Vernon's holidays, and in the afternoon she was to meet Kathleen at Charing Cross. Their eleven months' separation would be ended, and their life together at Thornton begun.

"Of course she will be altered," thought the elder sister, "she was such a childish little thing. I hope she looks older now, or Miss Aspen will never think her staid enough for the junior class. Oh, Katy, how thankful I am to have you back; it has been such dreary work living without you."

The morning hours dragged painfully. It seemed to Dorothy her watch must be slow, so tardily did it hands move, she was ready long before it was time to start, and even then reached Charing Cross a good half-hour before the boat train was expected.

At last!

The train steamed slowly into the big station. Dorothy could hardly restrain her impatience as she walked down the platform scanning each alighting passenger.

Kathleen would be alone. Madame Bertin's "Pension des Dames" was not so kind of establishment which sends home its English pupils under the care of a stern duenna.

As a fact, Kathleen's finishing school was a large middle-class college at Boulogne, very little affected by English, and selected by Dorothy because she hoped the surroundings, being entirely foreign, her darling would make rapid progress in French.

At last!

Dorothy's arms were round a slight girlish creature, a full head and shoulders shorter than herself, and her sister's kiss was once more on Kathleen's cheek.

But was that Katy? Why, the girl looked as if she had been ill for weeks; pale and thin, her face had a drawn pinched look which went to Dorothy's heart, and surely Katy's eyes had never looked so wonderfully large before.

The elder sister recalled all the disparaging remarks she had ever heard from prejudiced stay-at-home friends about cheap French schools, and hated herself for sending Katy to Madame Bertin's.

"Oh, my darling, how ill you look!" she cried. "Why didn't you write and tell me you weren't happy at Boulogne? and you should have come back at once."

"But I was quite happy, Dorothy," said Kathleen, eagerly; "old madame is just one of the kindest women I ever met—more like a mother to the girls than a schoolmistress."

"But she must have half-starved you! Why, Katy, darling, you look like a little white ghost!"

Katy laughed, and answered merrily,—"Then it must be the nature of me to be thin, for I assure you the food was excellent and plentiful. Don't grumble at me any more, Princess, or I shall think you are not glad to see me."

"Not glad! Why, I'm delighted! I have been counting the days till the first of August."

So had Kathleen, but for a very different reason.

She was tired and languid, but she never hinted a cab would be a pleasanter means of transit than two trains. They changed at Waterloo.

She knew Dorothy was not rich. So, after half-an-hour's travelling in dirty close third-class carriages, and rather more time passed in waiting at a crowded station, they reached Thornton at last, and Dorothy decided a porter

should bring up the luggage and they would walk to Mayfield.

Even then the little sister uttered no complaint. She tried to talk cheerfully, and laughed gaily at Dorothy's description of Miss Aspen, the stately head mistress, but the laugh was hollow and the merriment forced, and when Mrs. Rayne's little servant opened the door Kathleen gave up the effort and, stumbling into the narrow hall, sank fainting on to the nearest chair.

There was quite a commotion. Dorothy knew nothing of illness, and had never seen anyone in a fainting fit before, but Mrs. Rayne came to the rescue; she and the sister carried Kathleen into the little sitting-room and laid her on the sofa; then, when her hat had been removed and strong restoratives applied, after a few minutes she opened her eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Dolly; I couldn't help it," Dorothy was all contrition for her want of consideration in letting the girl overtire herself.

Mrs. Rayne stayed with them till Katy seemed more herself, then she sped away promising to send in tea at once, and with a strange feeling of compassion for the poor child who seemed so unfit to play the rôle her sister had marked out for her.

"Polly," she said to her eldest child, a girl of fifteen, and a helpless cripple, yet her mother's greatest help and comfort, "I'm afraid Miss Vernon will be dreadfully disappointed; they'll never take Kathleen on at the High School when once they have seen her."

Polly opened her eyes.

"Isn't she nice, mother dear? I am afraid I haven't taken much interest in her. Miss Vernon talked of her till I got tired of her very name."

"I should say that she was very nice," said Mrs. Rayne, "but she is a tiny little creature, who looks more like a child than a girl of eighteen, and I am afraid she is awfully delicate. She fainted dead away as soon as she got in."

"Well," said Polly, "no doubt Miss Vernon brought her home third-class, and made her walk up from the station. Our lodger may be a model woman, mother dear, but she despises weakness, and always seems to look down on people who are not so strong as herself. I am sure I pity Katy. What a lecture she will have for presuming to faint!"

But Dorothy was in no mood to lecture; indeed, she was far too anxious. She might be hard on other people, but she would never knowingly be hard on Kathleen. She would work for her, toil for her. For the girl's own sake she might regret her delicacy, but she would never let her feel herself a burden.

Katy seemed to revive after tea; she sat in a low chair by the open window, and looked at the little garden, where all the young Raynes, except Polly, were desporting themselves.

"What a lot of children! However do they fit into this house?"

"The three boys go to school. They are home now for the holidays. It must be rather a squeeze, but they use these rooms while I am away. I mean us to start on Tuesday. You will be rested then, Katy, and a fortnight at the sea will do you all the good in the world."

"But I am not ill," protested Kathleen, "and Boulogne was the seaside."

"Oh, but that was school! Where shall we go, Katy. I'll leave the choice to you, only we mustn't fix on a place more than a hundred miles away from London, or the railway fare will be too dear."

"We must think it over. There's a whole week," and Katy really spoke as though the seven days' delay were a boon to her.

She was very pretty; but Mrs. Rayne's verdict was a true one. No business-like head-mistress would ever have engaged her as an assistant. It was not merely that she was too pretty and looked too young, she was cast altogether in too fragile a mould. No doubt she had managed to give English lessons to French girls when order and discipline were maintained for her by another teacher, but to fancy her in charge of a large class of little girls, responsible for their order and good management, was impossible.

Dorothy had hoped a year would find her sister taller, and with more authority; but

Kathleen had not grown a single inch, and was just the creature of smiles and tears who had gone away, excepting that now the tears seemed to preponderate over the smiles.

Miss Vernon began herself to despair. She wondered if it was her duty to tell the head mistress her sister would not be equal to the position offered her. Perhaps some lady in Thornton with little children might engage Katy as daily governess. It was in Dorothy's opinion a much inferior calling to a High School teacher's, but what else was there?

She herself was very busy, and the first day or two after Kathleen's return she had perforce to leave her. One or two of the summer sales were on, and Miss Vernon took the opportunity to attend them to renew her wardrobe. She had planned that she and Katy would go together, and make a sort of festival of the shopping, luncheon at a posh cook's and spending an hour or two at the National Gallery, perhaps returning to Thornton by water, as all the river steamers stopped there.

But after Katy's fainting attack Dorothy feared to fatigue her. She did hint something of her little plans, but Katy said frankly she would stay at home. She wouldn't be at all dull; besides, there was the needlework. Dorothy must have plenty of things that wanted mending, and she liked darning.

"I shall not feel quite so idle if I am doing something for you," she said quietly; and Dorothy at once agreed, and made over a well-filled mending basket to her sister. Kathleen had returned on Tuesday. Dorothy was in London Thursday and Friday, but on the latter evening after supper, when Kathleen had gone to bed, and her sister was writing letters, there came a little tap at the door.

Miss Vernon was certainly surprised to receive a visit from her landlady at past ten o'clock, besides Mrs. Rayne was not given to intrude on her lodger. She and Dorothy mutually found each other very satisfactory as landlady and tenant, but they had no common interests, and there was no pretence of friendship between them.

"I hope it is not too late to disturb you," began the widow, "but I wanted very much to see you for a few minutes, and I waited till your sister had gone to bed."

"I hope you are not going to tell me two people will be too much trouble for you," said Dorothy anxiously. "I should be very sorry to leave Mayfield."

"And I have no desire to lose you. Miss Vernon, will you pardon me if I seem meddlesome or intrusive, but are you easy about your sister?"

Dorothy started. She was not alarmed, because she privately considered Mrs. Rayne a very feeble woman, who took fright at nothing. She was not offended, because the little widow was so gentle and unassuming, no one could have thought her interfering.

"I don't think Boulogne agreed with Kathleen," she said gently. "I wish very much she had told me so; but it is too late now for regrets. We are going to the sea next week, and I hope that will set her up."

Mrs. Rayne shook her head.

"I think Miss Kathleen is very much out of health," she said gravely; "but I was not speaking of her body."

"Of what then?" demanded Dorothy, rather haughtily. "Katy is the merriest, happiest, little thing. Why you must have heard her laughing often."

"Yes, when you were at home—I thought yesterday she had gone with you to London, and I went into her room without knocking. I wanted to see if Mary had put up a clean blind. Miss Vernon, she was kneeling by the bed with her face buried in the quilt, sobbing as though her very heart would break. I closed the door noiselessly and came away. I hope she never knew I had witnessed her grief."

Dorothy Vernon answered nothing.

"A little while later she came into my parlour and asked me about the poets. I told her there were seven a day here, both in and out. Then she asked if 'Mayfield, Thornton,' was sufficient



address. Would a letter so directed be sure to come here? I told her I had lived in this house twelve years, and had never given any other address, and never to my knowledge lost a letter. While we were talking the postman knocked, and Mary brought in the letters. I shall never forget your sister's face; it was full of such an agonised longing, such hungry expectancy that I would have given anything in the world if one of the letters had been for her. I tried to speak cheerfully, and told her there were two more posts to-night, but as she turned away I could see the tears in her eyes."

Dorothy looked troubled.

"Kathleen has no relation but me. No close friends; unless from one of the schoolgirls she has left I should not have expected her to have any letters."

"I could not get her face out of my head," said Mrs. Rayne, "it was so full of sadness. I feared you would resent my coming, but I could not help feeling I ought to tell you. If only you could win her confidence she might trust you with her secret."

"I don't believe she has a secret," returned Dorothy. "I don't believe she has a thought unshared by me."

"Indeed! Did she tell you of the telegram she sent yesterday. I was in the office when she wrote it."

A look of misery crossed Dorothy's face; then Kathleen had deceived her!

"I know you mean kindly," she said to Mrs. Rayne, "but I can't thank you. It seems only yesterday that she was a child depending on me for every thing, and now—if you are right—I know less of her concerns than a stranger."

"Girls are often diffident in speaking about a love affair," said Mrs. Rayne gravely. "I dare say Kathleen is longing to confide in you, only she does not know how to begin."

## CHAPTER II.

MISS VERNON was up a little earlier than usual the next morning, and in the sitting-room before the postman came. But early as it was Kathleen was there already seated by the window, which commanded a full view of the suburban road.

No doubt Mrs. Rayne was right. Katy was watching for the postman. She had probably watched like this every morning, and if the letter had come she would have secured and concealed it before her sister's arrival.

Dorothy was wounded to the quick, but she would not show her pain, and kissed Kathleen as fondly as usual.

The postman did not stop at Mayfield, so there was no question of letters. Dorothy knew the very moment he passed the house by the change in Kathleen's face.

"Really, Katy," the elder sister said as they sat at breakfast, "we must make up our minds where to go. This is Saturday, and on Tuesday we start."

"Won't every place be crowded the day after bank holiday?" asked Katy. "I think it would be better to go on Thursday."

"Well, Thursday be it," answered Dorothy, "but not a day later, or we shall be missing all this beautiful weather."

"Are you going out this morning, Princess?" demanded Katy with an attempt at her old gaiety, which did not deceive her sister, "you seem quite a gadabout."

"No, dear, I am going to stay at home, there are several things I want to talk to you about."

"Please, don't," said Katy; "when Madame Bertin was going to grumble at anything she always used to begin by saying she wanted to have one word with me."

Dorothy smiled.

"But I am not Madame Bertin, Katy, and I never grumbled at you in my life."

"Never once," confessed Katy; "you've been the best sister in the world, and I'm a horrid disappointment to you."

"That I deny," said Miss Vernon; "but we won't talk about serious things till Mary has taken away the tray, and we are not likely to be interrupted."

Ten minutes later the time came. Katy would fain have postponed it, but old habits are strong, and she could hardly defy Dorothy to her face.

"You know Miss Aspen had promised you the post of mistress of the lowest form," began Miss Vernon; "the salary was to be eighty pounds a year, and I was so pleased because I thought we could keep together. But you look so young still, and you seem so delicate, I have been wondering if we had better write to Miss Aspen—she is away, or we would call—and tell her you do not feel equal to the work."

Kathleen looked at her sister wistfully.

"How could you possibly guess it, Dorothy? Ever since I came home I have been feeling that it would be better to let her know. I am sure I should not be clever enough for her, and—I feel so tired."

Dorothy stroked the golden hair caressingly, and stifled back her own disappointment.

"I will write this morning, dear; and Katy, I think you had better see a doctor before we go away. Dear, it isn't right for you to be always tired."

"Oh, I shall be better soon. I don't want any medicine. I shall get well at once now I haven't got to think about the school."

"Was the idea so dreadful to you?"

"I couldn't have done it, Dorothy. I—I haven't enough self-control to keep children in order, and I hate teaching."

"But, Katy," said her sister rather doubtfully, "what else can you do? When you are stronger teaching seems the best work for you."

Kathleen shook her head.

"I hate it so."

"You are changed from my little fairy," went on her sister; "don't you remember, Katy, our castle in the air was to keep school together? Dear, will you be frank with me? Are you fretting about anything I don't know of?"

Katy burst into tears, and flung herself into her sister's arms.

"I should have told you long ago, only I thought you'd never forgive me."

"What is it?" asked Dorothy with a strange lump rising in her throat. "Oh, Katy, don't tell me you have a lover."

"Lovers are nice things," said Katy, lightly, "but that isn't all; he is my husband, Dorothy; I belong to him for always."

Dorothy Vernon felt as if the foundations of her existence had suddenly given way. Katy, little Katy with a husband, the child whom she had caressed and taught, cared for and protected to be suddenly transformed into a married woman!

There was a sharp bitter pain at her heart for the deception practised upon her, a kind of blank sensation that nothing mattered any more, and she had nothing left to live for, and yet through all the grief and personal sorrow came a feeling of amazement—how had Kathleen managed it!

She had left England eleven months before without a single masculine acquaintance, she had lived ever since in a strict French school, how had she achieved a wedding-ring?

Kathleen, the ice once broken, was only too pleased to tell her story.

It seemed that there was one other English girl at Madame Bertin's, and she had insisted on carrying her off to spend the Easter holidays at her home in Folkestone. At Adeline Wilmot's house Kathleen met her lover; a slight outbreak of measles made the vacation five weeks instead of a scanty fortnight; before those five weeks were over she had discovered she could never be happy again without Fred, and they were married.

Dorothy listened in a tumult of mingled surprise and trouble.

"And the Wilmots?" she asked, anxiously, "what were they about to allow it?"

"They never even suspected it. Adeline rather admired my Fred herself, so it would never have done to tell her. She was not returning to school, so there was no chance of her finding out. Fred is an artist; he took me back to Madame Bertin's, and stayed at a little place near Boulogne; then we met whenever we could, but at last his father sent for him, and he had to go home."

"And where is he now?" demanded Dorothy.

"and why didn't he make a home for you at

once instead of sending you back to Madame Bertin's?"

"He couldn't; his father would be so angry if he heard of our marriage; he wants Fred to propose to his cousin, an odious girl with money."

"Where were you married?" asked Dorothy, trying hard not to say what she thought.

"At St. Olive's, Folkestone; the Wilmots are Disasters, so they were not likely to hear of it."

"And your husband," asked Miss Vernon, gravely. "Where is he now, and how long does he purpose keeping up this secrecy?"

"He is in the country," she blushed crimson, "at least I have written and telegraphed to the address he gave me in London, and he has not answered, so I feel sure he is away. Don't be angry, Dorothy, he is away for my sake, trying to smooth things over with his father."

"And you have been married—how long?"

"Nearly four months. Oh, Fred is sure to make a home for me soon; he is so good and handsome I know you will like him."

Miss Vernon felt equally sure of experiencing the opposite sentiment, but she would not grieve her pretty little sister by saying so.

"What is his name, dear, and is he a professional artist or only an amateur?"

"His name is Browne—Fred Browne, and he is only an artist from choice; he doesn't really need a profession; his father is a very rich man."

"And did he feel no qualms about letting you return to Madame Bertin's as an articled pupil?" demanded Dorothy, who was in no mood to mince matters.

"Oh, he could not help it," said Kathleen, naively; "he is so dependent on his father he could not risk offending him."

"Coward," thought Dorothy, but she only asked, "Where does Mr. Browne, senior, reside? Has he any profession?"

"Why, no; I've just told you, Dorothy, he's too rich to need one; he lives in the country—in Hertfordshire, I think Fred said."

"Mr. Browne, of Hertfordshire!" why, to seek him out would be something like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay!

Dorothy loved her sister dearly, but she did think Katy might have ascertained a few more particulars about her father-in-law.

She tried another tack.

"Has your husband any brothers or sisters? Is his mother living?"

"His mother is devoted to him," cried Katy, "he is her only child; but he has a half brother and sister, his father has been married twice."

"And how long do you suppose it will be before you hear from your husband? What arrangements did you make about your future?"

Kathleen looked pained at the cross-examination; the tears stood in her eyes.

"Why, Dorothy, I have told you we hadn't time to make any plans. Fred had to leave Boulogne quite suddenly; his father telegraphed for him. He has written to me several times, of course, and he said as I was so soon coming home I had better keep our secret till then. I hoped he would have been here before now. I expect him every day."

"And that is why you want to postpone our little holiday?"

"If you don't mind very much, Dorothy. You see it would look so unkind if I had gone away when Fred came."

"I will wait a little," said Dorothy; "and then she went out of the room and, for the first time in her life, condescended to ask Mrs. Rayne's advice."

She had looked on the widow hitherto as a very helpless sort of person; a creature who had married foolishly, and seemed to think seven children sufficient reward for toiling from morning to night; but Miss Vernon confessed to herself that her landlady probably knew more of men than she did.

There were three boys carpentering in the parlour, but Mrs. Rayne took Dorothy up into the nursery, which was empty. She guessed by her white troubled face she had something private to discuss.

"You were right and I was wrong," said

Dorothy, bluntly; "I have just got Katy to confide in me."

"And it is a love affair!"

"It is almost worse. Mrs. Rayne, you know much more of the world than I do; I seem to have spent my life in schoolrooms. Have you time to listen to the story? I don't ask you to keep it secret, I am sure you will do that; but I want you to tell me—to me it sounds as if the man were a scoundrel—I want you tell me I am wrong, and that such things happen every day. I never had a lover, I don't profess to understand their ways."

"Your turn will come some day, Miss Vernon," said the widow, gently, "and then the 'ways' will seem pleasant to you; but if you will trust me with Katy's story I will give you my frank and honest opinion."

Unconsciously she dropped the formal prefix and spoke of the girl by her pretty home name. Dorothy liked her the better for it.

It was an unutterable relief to pour out the story to an attentive listener.

"You see," concluded poor Dorothy, "Katy is such a child, she never thinks how little she really knows of this Mr. Browne."

"Could you not ascertain more particulars from the Wiltons?" suggested Mrs. Rayne.

"Unfortunately they have all gone back to America; the father is in business there, and they were only in Europe for a time."

The two women looked into each other's eyes. Neither spoke the fear in both their hearts.

"You say your sister has Mr. Browne's London address. In your place I should call and see him."

"But such an address," said Dorothy, with a groan; "a library near Victoria-station. Mrs. Rayne what can this man be like, if he has not even an abode of his own where his wife can write to him?"

"It looks black," admitted the widow, sadly; "but he may be afraid of her letters meeting his father's scrutiny."

"His father lives in the country, somewhere in Hertfordshire."

"Has Kathleen any anxiety about her husband's silence?"

"To me she maintains that it is only because he is out of town; but I can't forget what you told me yesterday; how if she already doubts him?"

"She was married in church?"

"Yes, at Folkestone."

"I should go down to Folkestone and look at the register," said Mrs. Rayne. "If the marriage was regular I don't think there is much the matter, except carelessness. Though that a man should neglect his wife before they have been married six months is bad enough."

"But all marriages in church are regular," objected Dorothy.

"Yes, if all formalities are complied with. Of course you may not feel as I do. I should want to see the register and ask the clerk a few questions. Church clerks are great observers. You would get a far better idea of Mr. Browne like that than from your sister's description."

Dorothy turned to the elder woman appealingly.

"Would you go with me? Oh, if only you could spare the time. I should be so glad. I don't think I could bear to search the register alone. I should be so frightened."

She managed somehow to make the gentle widow understand all the expense of the expedition should be her care, and Mrs. Rayne yielded at last, because she was really sorry for the tall, handsome school-mistress who had never before seemed to her so human.

They arranged to go on the Tuesday, earlier was impossible, church registers are not to be inspected on Sundays, and Monday, being Bank holiday, was not a pleasant day for travelling.

"If all is well we might stay a few hours and enjoy a glimpse of the sea," suggested Dorothy.

"Shall you tell your sister?"

"Only that you and I are going out for the day. She won't miss me. I believe she is happier when there is no one to prevent her spending all her time at the window watching for the post-man."

This was on Tuesday morning, and an hour later they started. The boys had gone to a cricket match, and Polly was capable of looking after the "little one," so Mrs. Rayne's mind was comparatively at ease respecting her family.

They found the entry which Mrs. Rayne, herself a clergyman's daughter, told Dorothy she was sure was in due form. The clerk added his testimony.

"It was a pretty wedding though a very quiet one. The bride was just like a picture, and it was spring time you see, and so she carried a big bunch of primroses. She'd just a plain walking dress and a sailor hat with a blue ribbon, but she looked just as a bride should."

"And the groom?" asked Mrs. Rayne, quietly.

"Oh, he was a tip-topper. Gave me a sovereign just as another man would a shilling. The license described him as of full age, and his profession was given as 'gentleman,' just as you see it in the register. He looked a born nobleman. I'm sure I never expected him to have such a homely name as Browne."

Much relieved, the ladies took a stroll on the Leas, watched the incoming of the boat from Boulogne, and altogether made the most of their time. It was past eight when they reached Mayfield.

"I hope Katy has not been dull or feeling lonely," said Dorothy.

"I asked her to go and see Polly if she wanted company," replied Mrs. Rayne.

The little servant opened the door with a face full of importance, but she said nothing.

Miss Vernon ran into her own sitting-room, but returned in a moment with a troubled face.

"Where is my sister, Mary?"

"Please, miss," said the little maid, "she sent me to call a cab, and then she went off with her luggage."

"What!" cried Dorothy, hoarsely; but Mrs. Rayne put one hand on her arm, and said, gently,—

"Come to Polly, she will perhaps have a message. Anyway, she will explain better."

Polly could add very little to Mary's testimony. There had been a letter for Miss Kathleen Vernon by the midday post. She had read it, and promptly packed her box, sending Mary for the cab. Polly had begged her to remain at least until her sister returned, but she only said she must go at once.

"Did she leave no message for me?" asked Miss Vernon with something like a sob in her voice, but Polly could only shake her head.

The deserted sister sat up far into the silent night. Her grief was almost swallowed up in anxiety. Katy, who had seemed almost like her own child, had forsaken her, that was bad enough, but far worse was the uncertainty as to her fate.

She was really married to Mr. Browne, so much was certain, but in spite of the clerk's testimony that he was a "tip-topper" Dorothy had a nameless fear in her heart that he was not worthy of her little sister.

### CHAPTER III.

In one of the loveliest parts of Hertfordshire, a few miles from railway-station and shops, but with beautiful natural surroundings if they could atone for its remoteness, stood the pretty village of King's Crofton.

It was only thirty miles from London "as the crow flies," but circumstances of situation and population had made it so far removed from the metropolis that it might—for people who did not keep a carriage—as well have been sixty or a hundred.

It took its name from Lord Crofton, a nobleman of old family who owned most of the village, and was content to live at his ancestral home of Crofton Bury from one year's end to another.

The Croftons had been known in Hertfordshire for centuries. Their blood was of the bluest, their name of the most ancient, and there was almost a panic in the country when the present Baron married his children's nursery governess, a young woman of no rank, no fortune, and, as it seemed to the onlookers, no beauty; and bur-

dened moreover—as the whole neighbourhood knew—with the most disreputable old father any girl could have had.

Lord Crofton was very much in love. He pensioned off the maids as best he could, and tried to forget him; but it was a great relief to him when the old man died, and there were people who discovered he was by no means pleased when his youngest child grew out of infancy to be told that the little boy was the image of his grand-papa.

Wilfred Crofton was his mother's darling, she simply worshipped him; and as he was one of the handsomest young men in Hertfordshire she did not at all mind being told that he "resembled her family."

Perhaps years, and the softening veil death flings over a man's faults, had made her forget all the details of her father's career, or surely she would have been anxious lest the resemblance to him should extend to mind as well as features.

Second marriages often bring strife; but Lord Crofton's had been very peaceful.

Denis and Barbara had loved their governess as dearly as children of five and six are capable of loving anyone; and as her kindness never changed when she became their step-mother their affection was undiminished.

They were very fond of Wilfred, who seemed at first more like a plaything than a companion. Barbara married when her half-brother was twelve years old, and so had no chance of ever finding him in the way, and Captain Crofton was devoted to the half-brother seven years younger than himself.

But as the years passed on Lord Crofton began to feel anxious. No better wife, no more devoted mother existed than his Alice.

She had risen to every duty of her position, was a favourite with rich and poor, making Crofton Bury one of the most popular houses in the county; but it seemed as though the taint of her father's evil ways, which had passed over her, was fastening on her son.

Wilfred had been a pretty child, and the darling of his nurses; but when he went to a preparatory school the Lady Principal, after a year's endurance of his vagaries, suggested to Lord Crofton he needed to be under masculine authority. If not publicly expelled from Eton he only escaped the indignity by his father's removing him suddenly (on a hint from the authorities), and at Oxford he came an awful cropper, and was "sent down" at the end of his first year.

"I can't make it out," said poor Lord Crofton to his elder son, now a Captain in a regiment stationed at Knightsbridge; "when he's here Wilfred seems a harmless fellow enough; but wherever he goes he comes back to us a failure. This last affair has well-nigh broken his mother's heart, though we kept the worst from her."

Captain Crofton shook his head.

"It's hard to condemn Wilfred because he's been foolish. He's only twenty-one even now. Surely there's time enough for him to make a fresh start and redeem the past."

"Do you know how much I have paid on his account since he went to Oxford? Two thousand pounds, and I doubt if he has told me the extent of his liabilities even now."

"What does he propose to do himself?"

"Go in for Art. I wonder," said Lord Crofton sadly, "if there ever was a young man who made a fool of himself who did not propose to 'go in for art,' provided he could use a paint brush at all."

"I suppose you wouldn't put him into the army? I might look after him a bit."

"He'd never pass the exams. And I couldn't afford it. A son in a fashionable regiment costs a lot. Don't look like that, Denis, I'm not blaming you. Few eldest sons have been less expensive than mine. But don't you see the position's different; you've half your mother's fortune, and want very little from me. Some day you'll come in for everything here. Wilfred has nothing in the world but what I give him, and it would be no kindness to put him into a position he would have to give up at my death for want of means."

"I always fancied your savings were consider-



able, and, of course, they would come to Wilfred."

"They are almost as," said Lord Crofton frankly. "Whenever I have speculated I have failed, and though I'm not extravagant I have spent nearly all my income. There were improvements on the estate, and so on, then there was Barbara's dowry. When a man's only girl is to be a duchess he can't send her away empty-handed. I wanted Wilfred to take orders. This living must be vacant in a few years, and it's worth a good deal, but after this affair at Oxford it's out of the question. Then there's your cousin Maudie; she and Wilfred always seemed to me made for each other, but your uncle's so angry at something he heard about Will, he's taken her abroad, and his term of office in India is seven years, so it's not likely she'll come home fancy free."

The result of all this was that Mr. Wilfred Crofton was sent to Germany with a tutor whose testimonials represented him as an eminently qualified bear leader.

The foreign trip was to last a year, and Wilfred was to study languages with a view to a diplomatic post by-and-by.

Before six months had passed Mr. Melville resigned his charge. "Lord Crofton's son was beyond his influence," he said gravely, "therefore he was robbing Lord Crofton by taking a salary he did not earn." Their plan for him having failed the parents allowed Wilfred to try his own, and he started for Italy—alone this time—to study art, and when a few months had passed without their learning anything disreputable about him the family with one consent drew a breath of relief, and declared Wilfred would be a credit to them after all.

It was a lovely morning at the end of August, and Captain Crofton had just returned home on a month's leave, that he might be in time for the partridges on the First.

He sat at breakfast with his father and step-mother, a handsome earnest-looking man, a little graver, perhaps, than his thirty years seemed to warrant, but for all that a son to be proud of.

"Denis," said Lord Crofton suddenly, "I wish you would leave the army, marry, and settle down. The old lady who has had the Dower House so long died last week, and if you'd entertain the notion I would arrange with the executors to cancel the rest of the lease and do up the house for you. It's a pretty place enough, and you'd be on the spot to help me look after the estate."

Denis looked thoughtful.

"I shall never marry until I find someone to suit me," he said simply; "but to tell you the truth I have had some thought of leaving the army. The regiment will go abroad next year, and while Wilfred is such a rover I don't think you would like me to leave England."

"Indeed I shouldn't. Well, if I leave you in peace on the subject of matrimony will you agree to the rest of my plan?"

"Do," said Lady Crofton gently; "we see so little of Barbara, Denis, that we are very lonely, and it would be such a comfort to your father to have you close at hand."

"Old Regton has resigned at last," went on Lord Crofton; "if you'll settle here you shall choose his successor, Denis."

Denis smiled.

"If I leave the army I should like to be his successor myself. I am sure I couldn't live an idle life, and it would be just the work I like. Then I really couldn't take possession of the Dower House, it's much too grand for a bachelor; Regton's pretty cottage would suit me exactly; the garden is charming, and if the stable proved too small I daresay you'd put up my hunter."

"The agent's cottage," said Lady Crofton; "it doesn't seem good enough for you, Denis."

"It will just suit me."

Lord Crofton seemed inclined to fall in with the idea.

"If Mrs. Percival's niece finds the Dower House a white elephant I would still take it off her hands, the place is so near our grounds I own I could not bear to see it neglected."

"I never heard Mrs. Percival had a niece," said

Captain Crofton. "I am sure I never heard of her."

"Nor anyone else," replied his father, "but the good old lady's will was plain enough; she left everything she had in the world to her lawyer and the rector of Kings' Crofton to hold in trust for her niece, Dorothy Vernon, who is to enjoy the interest of her fortune, but who will have no power to anticipate the income, or alienate the principal."

"And pray was Miss Vernon discovered in absolute penury, like the heroine of a novel?"

"No; she was found in a highly respectable London suburb, where she followed the calling of High School Teacher. I believe she resigned her situation on the spot, and is coming down here soon to see the Hermitage."

The Hermitage was a pleasant, low-roofed house, built entirely of white stone; its garden joined the Bury grounds, and for a good while it had been the Dower House of the Ladies Crofton. As for over fifty years no Lord Crofton had left a widow it came about that the little homestead had been let to successive tenants, although of such a rank as would make them congenial neighbours for the family at the Bury.

Denis almost exclaimed that it was desecration to fancy the old place inhabited by a mere school mistress, and stopped just in time, recollecting his gentle step-mother had been a nursery governess, a post lower than that of high school teacher.

A fortnight had passed day for day since Kathleen's flight, and brought not a single line from her. Dorothy was growing almost desperate, when on the Monday afternoon a card was brought her inscribed—

"Mr. CLAYTON,

"Pump Court, Temple."

She met her visitor with an eager welcome that surprised him.

"You have brought me news; oh, please tell me if my sister is well."

Mr. Clayton started.

"My dear young lady," he said gravely, "I am sorry to cause you disappointment, but I do not come from your sister; I was not even aware you possessed such a near relative."

Her smile faded.

"I beg your pardon," she said sadly. "When one is waiting anxiously for news and a stranger arrives, it is natural to think he brings it."

"It is indeed. I am the bearer of very important news, however. I think you knew that your aunt, Mrs. Percival, was in very delicate health?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"I have heard nothing of Aunt Margaret for years; when my father died she offered me a home if I would leave my sister; of course it was out of the question. I refused, and she has never forgiven me."

"She died last week, and her will proves that she forgave you perfectly. She has left you her whole property."

"It is very kind of her. I'm afraid I can't feel elated. I earn a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and now I have lost my sister I do not need any more; still, with a dreary little smile, 'I daresay a hundred pounds will come in useful some day.'"

"You don't understand. Mrs. Percival was a very rich woman."

"Yes; but I always understood her income died with her."

"Not a bit of it. She has tied it up very tight, and married or single you will not be able to touch the principal, but you will have seven hundred a-year for life, and jewels and old lace enough to make you the envy of your acquaintances."

He went on to explain that three years still remained of the lease of the Hermitage, but Lord Crofton was willing to release her from this if she desired it.

"In your place, though, I should settle there," said Mr. Clayton. "King's Crofton is one of the loveliest places in Hertfordshire. The Hermitage is let for fifty pounds a year, far less than its value, and as you must live somewhere I don't think

you can do better. No doubt you have some elderly cousin who could act as a duenna, and you will find plenty of pleasant society round."

Of the whole sentence only one word had really impressed Dorothy, "Hertfordshire." From Kathleen's revelations the Brownes were a family of consequence in that county. Would it be possible that by settling there and making acquaintances she would in course of time discover the whereabouts of her beloved sister? Could it be that "Fred" was keeping Katy away because he did not wish to acknowledge as a relative such a humble person as a school-teacher?

She listened as in a dream to Mr. Clayton's explanation, but her course was decided on. She knew that Miss Aspen's own widowed sister was seeking a post either as housekeeper or chaperon, and guessed that the head mistress would pardon her own summary departure, if it provided Mrs. Bruce with a home.

After Mr. Clayton had left her Dorothy Vernon shed a few tears. The old life of honest toil must pass away. What would the new life bring her?

How happy she and Katy might have been if this good fortune had come only a year—six months sooner. Why did life's good things come too late for her to value them?

She poured out her story to Mrs. Rayne that evening, asking as a favour to be allowed still to rent the two rooms at Mayfield.

"It was here that I lost Kathleen," she said earnestly; "it is here she would seek me if she were in any trouble. You know all, and I can trust you to be kind to my little sister if she came here in sorrow."

Mrs. Rayne promised, but suggested she could equally take care of Kathleen even if the rooms were let to someone else; it seemed to her like taking fifteen shillings a week for nothing.

"But I shall often come to London, and then you will take me in," explained Dorothy, "and now I have one more thing to ask you. I would not tell Mr. Clayton my sister's story because he lives in Hertfordshire, and it might prejudice him against her; but I want to go to a London lawyer and tell him everything and ask if there is any step I can take to find her. I have advertised a dozen times in despair."

"My brother is a lawyer," said Mrs. Rayne, "and I know you might trust him to keep your secret."

"I would far rather go to him than to a stranger."

Mr. Lawes listened to Dorothy's story with interest, but his advice was not reassuring.

"My dear Miss Vernon, it sounds cruel to say so, but you can do nothing but wait. If your sister's husband is worthy her affection in time she must win him over to announce his marriage, and let her send you her address. If he is a scoundrel she is equally certain to seek you out, because, poor girl, sooner or later, she will need your help."

Mrs. Rayne explained Dorothy's accession to fortune, and her idea of living in Hertfordshire in the hope of coming on the trace of the Brownes.

"I should say they really lived in Hertfordshire," remarked the lawyer, "because he could have had no object in deceiving his wife as to the county, but I doubt the name."

"What!"

"Don't look so troubled, Miss Vernon. Under whatever name Browne married your sister the ceremony would be legal, provided she believed it to be his true one. I think 'Browne' was assumed because—if we credit his story—he belonged to a family of note and position. Well, I know Hertfordshire well, and I don't believe there is a single county family there called Browne. I should say that the domestic facts you know were far more likely to help your search. It is not every man who marries twice. You know also that there were two children—a son and daughter by the first wife, and one only son by the second; also that the younger son is supposed to be an artist. You are setting yourself a tedious wearisome task, but I won't say it is a hopeless one."

"I think it would be simpler to write to the

Wilmots," said Mrs. Rayne. "As they are a well-known New York family, it would be possible to get their address, and they might know more of Mr. Browne's family than poor Kathleen."

"Do you mean Thomas B. Wilmot, the great dry-goods man? I can give you his address myself. I did a few little things for him when he was over, and he left me his business card."

As they went homewards it seemed to Dorothy that there was something left to hope for after all.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"ALICE, I wish you would call on Miss Vernon soon."

Gentle Lady Crofton looked bewildered.

"My dear, you were so against her coming; you said you would far rather take over the place yourself than risk it being neglected by a young woman who knew nothing but learning."

"Oh, I daresay I made a fool of myself," admitted her husband; "but I went to see Miss Vernon yesterday about the lease, and capitulated at once. She's the grandest-looking creature I ever saw; far more like a Duchess than our Barbara. Somehow she seems just to suit the quaint old-world rooms of the Hermitage. She said frankly that she knew no one, and had never been in Hertfordshire. So I said you'd be glad to be of use to her."

Captain Crofton looked at his step-mother with a smile of pity.

"You are let in for it, mater; but let us hope she won't prove very overpowering. When I hear of a grand-looking woman I always picture a gigantes."

"I will go this afternoon," said Lady Crofton. "Denis, I wish you would come with me!"

"Mother! Why, I never make morning calls, and detest strong-minded females. She'll talk about Gorton or Newham (whichever she happens to hail from), and do her best to make you believe science and mathematics are the sole objects in life."

But he was very fond of Lady Crofton, and so a little persuasion gained her the victory. The shooting began on the morrow; there would be no house-party, but a great gathering of neighbours. So to-morrow his hours would be fully occupied, but to-day was an idle afternoon, and his step-mother had timed the visit well to catch his company.

It was a lovely halcyon day. Miss Vernon and her companion were sitting on the terrace on to which the drawing-room windows opened. Lady Crofton and Denis joined them there, declaring they would pay their call out of doors.

"A grand creature, truly!" was Captain Crofton's unspoken criticism; "but she has some heavy trouble weighing on her. I wonder what it is!"

"No," said Dorothy, in reply to a question from his step-mother, "I had not seen my aunt for several years. She offered me a home when my father died, and was offended at my refusal."

"You preferred to be independent," said Denis, expecting a tirade on the glory of toil.

"I had one sister, four years younger than myself, and I could not desert her. Aunt Margaret was the sister of my own mother. She never forgave my father for marrying again, and considered Katy's existence as an injury to me. She offered to get her into an asylum for clergymen's orphan children (though she was past the age); it made me furious."

"I should say you were a good hater," replied Denis; "and does your sister still reside with you?"

"Oh, no; she married before she was eighteen. I am quite alone in the world."

"Well," said Lady Crofton, inquiringly, as they went away, "what do you think of Miss Vernon, Denis?"

"I would rather hear your opinion first."

"Oh, I am delighted with her. Denis, if only Wilfred were at home I am sure he would be taken with Miss Vernon; and if he married her I should feel quite happy about him. He couldn't go wrong with such a wife as she would

make, and you know, Denis, my boy is not wicked, only weak."

Usually Denis was apt to take a very lenient view of his brother's offences; but this afternoon his thoughts were "the selfishness of mothers, to think of tying that glorious creature to a poor weak boy like Wilfred." Aloud he only said,—

"She is a little too old."

"She is a year younger than Wilfred."

"In age, perhaps. In everything else she is much older. Miss Vernon is a woman, Wilfred only a boy."

"You know how much his father wants him to marry young," she urged, "and Maude is quite out of the question now."

"Quite. I heard from my uncle to day. His 'little girl' accepted his *aide-de-camp* on the voyage out, and they are to be married as soon as the trousseau can be sent from England."

"Well, I did think Maude cared for Wilfred."

"With a sisterly affection. Much what she feels for me."

"You and Wilfred are great contrasts; but you both seem averse to matrimony."

"Have you had any news of Wilfred lately? It seems ages since I heard anything of him—in fact, not since my father was laid up in June."

Lady Crofton played nervously with her parasol.

"He finds painting very hard work. He says people are so prejudiced against beginners he fears it will be ages before he earns much."

"My father allows him something, doesn't he?"

"Two hundred and fifty; and there is always a home here for him. It ought to be enough, but Wilfred has extravagant tastes. I can't think where he gets them from. I am sure his father and I are not lavish."

Denis thought most likely Wilfred inherited them from his grandfather. He had been old enough when old Browne died to hear a little of his misdeeds; but he could not wound her by saying so.

"When did you hear from Wilfred last?"

"Yesterday. He wanted money, and I sent him fifty pounds. I had saved it out of my allowance, and I could not bear to ask your father. He is so angry when the poor fellow outruns his allowance."

Denis could not blame her, though he felt she had acted foolishly.

Dorothy Vernon had not put on deep mourning for her aunt. It would have seemed to her hypocrisy to wear crape for a woman she had not known or loved; but with a sense of fitness peculiarly her own she gave up bright colours, and contented herself with black or those soft tones of mauve and grey which are allowed in half mourning.

Everyone followed Lady Crofton's example, and all the notables for miles round called at the Hermitage.

Mrs. Perceval had been a very sociable old lady, with a large circle of acquaintances, and these were disposed to welcome her niece warmly. A girl with seven hundred a-year, good birth, and handsome appearance, hampered by no poor relations, was—they thought—distinctly a person to be cultivated.

Quite fifty families called at the Hermitage during Dorothy's first month there. Old ladies, young ladies, grave and gay, her visitors boasted all variety. Some of them she liked, others she tolerated; but of the whole fifty there was no matron she liked so well as Lady Crofton.

"Ah!" said an old Dowager, who was decanting on her neighbours for the benefit of the new comer, "Lady Crofton is a woman in a thousand. She has managed not only to live down an enormous amount of prejudice, but actually to become a favourite with people who once looked down upon her."

"But why should anyone look down upon her. I thought Lady Crofton was one of the Hertfordshire magnates."

"Lady Crofton may be; but you see, my dear, there are plenty of us left who can remember her as little Alice Browne, the penniless child of a disgraced old lawyer, who had been struck off the Rolls, and was altogether too dreadful for

anyone to know. Lady Hood thought it quite a work of charity when she engaged her as nursery governess to her sister's children, and never dreamed she would become their step-mother."

"Then Lady Crofton was a Miss Browne?"

"Yes; all the Brownes were a disreputable set; but I think her father was the worst of the tribe."

"And he lived here?"

Lady Dereham seemed surprised at the interest with which Miss Vernon pursued the subject.

"Why, yes; that is about twelve miles off, at Mitchin. I can assure you, my dear, we all knew the story. It says a good deal for Lord Crofton's affection that he was willing to become old Browne's son-in-law."

It must be a false clue, Dorothy decided. The name of Browne was common enough. Still the first time she heard it in Hertfordshire, the county where Katy's husband declared his family resided, naturally aroused her attention.

"I am sure the marriage has turned out happily," she said slowly. "Lady Crofton and her husband seem a regular Darby and Joan."

"Yes," Lady Dereham shook her head; "but it's dangerous all the same to marry a scoundrel's daughter. The hereditary taint comes out in the children."

"But Captain Crofton—"

"Oh, Captain Crofton is an admirable Crichton, he's only one fault—that he won't marry; but he is not old Browne's grandson. Surely you know Lord Crofton has a younger son, half brother to the Captain and Duchess Barbara?"

"What a way to describe her!"

"Oh, I assure you we are very proud of Barbara. She grew up among us, and was as simple and unsophisticated as any village maid; she never even had a season in London. They were just talking about her 'coming out' when the Marquis passed through King's Crofton on a walking tour. Of course he called at the Bury. His mother had been a nineteenth cousin of the first Lady Crofton. Well in three weeks they were engaged; in two months they were married, and fate kindly removed the young man's father in less than a year, so that Barbara was a Duchess before she was nineteen."

"And is she happy?"

"Perfectly, I should say. Only she is so wrapped up in the Duke and the sundry little lords and ladies she can never find time to come home. She is a model wife and mother; but I shouldn't call her a very dutiful daughter. However, with seven children in ten years, I daresay she is busy."

The next day Miss Vernon received a letter with an American stamp, which she perused in the privacy of her own room. It was from Adeline Wilmot, and if the style was not all that could be desired, the matter was decidedly painful to Dorothy, it yet left no doubt of the writer's kind feelings towards Kathleen.

"DEAR MISS VERNON,—"

"Mother says I am to answer your letter, as she met so many people in Europe she can't remember them all, and I know Fred Browne far better than she did. He was awfully nice looking. Just what you Britishers call an aristocrat, and he seemed to have plenty of money; but I'm very sorry to hear Katy has married him. He cared a great deal too much for himself to make a good husband."

"We met him first in Paris, when we were there for the New Year. Ma came over and stayed at a pension, and I went to her for my holidays."

"Then he turned up at Folkestone in the spring, and he always seemed very much taken with Katy, but I never thought he was serious. After she went back to school he left Folkestone, and we never heard of him again; but my brother Bob met someone who knew him very well, and he said he wasn't Mr. Browne at all, but the son of a country nobleman. He had gone the pace too fast, and I think his father had sent him away to retrain a bit."

"Bob was very fond of taking photos—snapshots he used to call them—and ma says I'd better send one of Mr. Browne's, which was taken without his knowing. I hope Katy has



written to you by now. She's a foolish little thing if she believed all Fred told her. He was an awful spoon.

"Ma says she hopes you don't blame us, but we hadn't any idea of what was going on. And I remain,

"Yours sincerely,

"ADELINE B. WILMOT."

The "snap-shot" represented a young man in evening dress, just an average good-looking young Englishman with a rather weak mouth and very faultless attire. One of Dorothy's suspicious fies as she looked at the photo; she had sometimes fancied that "Mr. Browne" was some adventurer, and his tales of high descent were all romance.

She decided the original of the photograph was a gentleman (misused term), and in a good social position; but she did not like the face—it seemed to her not only weak but cruel.

The first impulse was to lock the photograph away in her desk; her next to drive into Mitchin and purchase a highly ornamental frame for it. By placing this photo on a centre table in her drawing-room she thought she might discover if the original were known to any of her visitors.

## CHAPTER V.

"By George, this is coming it too strong! I won't do it. I'll see him further first!" And Lord Crofton brought down his fist on the table with a bang, on a November morning, when the first cold of winter had touched the air.

His wife was not at breakfast, or perhaps he would have put a curb on his anger.

Captain Crofton looked up inquiringly.

"What is it?"

"Look and see."

Dennis read the letter which had so excited his father; it proved to be from Wilfred, and suggested that, as he was now quite positive art would not keep him, his allowance should be increased to eight hundred a year. No fellow could possibly get on on less. As to settling at the Bury, his ways were those of a young man, and he could not possibly conform to the dull stagnation of a country life.

Dennis looked at Lord Crofton.

"There have been other letters?"

"Half a dozen. They all harped on the same theme. A larger allowance! I offered him a home here; I offered to pay his debts if he would pass his word to settle down with us."

"He goes the pace, I'm afraid," said Dennis. "I heard of him lately as dropping a lot of money at Goodwood. Poor Wilfred! he'd have been a better fellow if he had had a few thousands a year."

"I haven't told my wife," Lord Crofton lowered his voice; "but I set my lawyer to make inquiries lately. Wilfred is often to be seen about with a young woman—a pretty childish-looking creature, whom no one seems to know."

Dennis looked grave. "A happy marriage might be his salvation even now."

"His mother's favourite dream is that he should come home and propose to Miss Vernon."

Captain Crofton sighed.

"I don't think Dorothy Vernon will ever marry."

"Why not? She is just the woman to make a good wife."

"She never seems to recognise that she is young. She speaks more like a woman of forty than a girl of twenty-two; and I am almost certain she has some secret trouble."

"It isn't a love story. I am positive Dorothy Vernon's love story is yet to come."

"And you think that Wilfred—"

"I am not a doating father, Dennis; I am fond of Wilfred with all his failings, but he isn't good enough for Dorothy Vernon. Now you are."

"No one is."

"Confess you are vanquished at last. You will own at last there is just one woman who is neither coquette nor bore."

"And if I do?"

"Well, you'd be a fool not to try to win her. Mark my words, Dennis, if she were penniless Dorothy Vernon would be a wife worth striving for."

"I quite agree with you."

"I can't undertake to do your love making for you," said Lord Crofton, "but I promise you one thing, I'll congratulate you warmly if you succeed. Now, what shall I say to Wilfred?"

"I should not write at all. Why not run up to London?"

"He writes from the Artists' Club. I suppose I could see him there? It's odd he never gives another address. He must live somewhere."

"I should go and see him," said Dennis, slowly, "and if there is any truth in the lawyer's story, and the girl in question is of good family, why not let them marry?"

"On eight hundred a year!—where's it to come from?"

"I might help," said Dennis, generously. "Anyway, marriage with a girl he loves might be his salvation."

Dennis went to London that very day on his own account, and Lord Crofton took his advice and followed on the next day, putting up at an old-established private hotel near the Strand; then he called on his lawyer.

"I saw your son only yesterday," admitted Mr. Dean. "He came to get an advance from me pending the arrival of a draft from you."

"And you let him have it?"

"Thirty pounds. He said it was for a debt of honour."

Lord Crofton groaned.

"Dean, just speak plainly, and try to forget I'm his father. What is he doing?"

"I'm afraid he's playing cards for far higher stakes than he can afford; then there is certainly an entanglement. I have seen the lady with him myself; she is a mere child, with fair hair and blue eyes. In August I met them several times. I suppose he thought London was empty, and no one would recognise him. Lately I have seen nothing of them."

"Does he mean to marry her?"

"I can form no idea. I should call on him, in your place, and ask."

"But I don't know where he lives; and such a conversation isn't well suited in a club room."

"Well, he has rooms in Clarges-street. I don't say he's often there, but you might find him in," giving the number.

For once fortune favoured Lord Crofton. He was shown into Wilfred's presence.

It was not reassuring to find him reclining on the sofa with a tumbler of champagne in his hand; but the father had known for some time past his younger son drank more than he approved.

"Good gracious!" demanded the prodigal. "Is the world coming to an end? I thought you considered London too wicked for your presence."

I hope you have come to say you will agree to my proposal. Eight hundred a year is a very small sum."

"Do you know that since you left Eton I have spent on you more than your elder brother has cost me in his whole life?"

Dennis always was a mean lot," remarked Wilfred, sulkily. "Just the kind of beggar always to keep within his allowance, and so teach you to be stingy."

"Look here, Wilfred; why won't you come home and turn over a new leaf?"

"Because, my lord, your ways are not mine. I have seen life and gone the pace, and to put up with the dullness of Crofton Bury for the rest of my days would be too hard a punishment."

"Dennis is with us now; he does not consider life with us punishment."

"No; he is the family model boy," grumbled Wilfred. "Besides, he never had everything against him; for years of my life you tried to drive me into a marriage with my cousin Maud; then, when I came round to your views, she chose to bestow herself on someone else. Now you expect me to bury myself in the country six miles from civilisation."

Lord Crofton made a last effort.

"I am told" he began awkwardly, for he was a very sensitive man, and he hated such subjects

"that you have formed an attachment. Wilfred, for your mother's sake don't wrong any girl who may be weak enough to love you; marry her if she can bring you an honest name, even if she has not a penny."

"It would be a trifle imprudent," said Wilfred. "My lord, I wish if you had meant to give me such very unworlly advice that you had done it a little sooner."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"That now it is too late."

"Wilfred!"

"Oh, you shall have the whole story if you like. I was married last April!"

"Legally?"

"Let me finish! She was a pretty little thing fresh from a French school and not unlike some convent maid; she had neither father nor mother, and the friends she was staying with didn't look after her. She worshipped me, and for a little while it was pleasant to be worshipped. I didn't want to lose her, so I married her."

"Then she is your wife?"

"You'd better let me finish," said Wilfred. "She went back to her French school and I took up my abode in a village near, meeting her whenever I got a chance. In June you sent for me, and as she was leaving school in August I never returned to France."

"She had a sister, a prim old maid the child was half afraid of; you were stingy enough to me single, I thought you'd cut off all the supplies if you knew I was married. I didn't dare to let the sister know my whereabouts lest she should insist on Katy having her rights; there's no one so troublesome to manage as a prim old maid."

"I wrote to Katy I was very ill, and she had better come and nurse me. The sister was out for the day, as I happened to know."

"And then?" asked Lord Crofton, anxiously, "what then?"

"Oh we lived at Clapham in lodgings, but she fretted about deceiving her sister, and I—tired of suburban respectability, you see I didn't dare confess my marriage to you; and I had no money to keep my wife respectably. At last I was in an awful temper, I'd lost a lot of money at cards, and when Katy made her eternal plaint about 'writing to Dorothy,' I told her I had married her under a false name, and that she had never been my wife at all."

Lord Crofton turned livid with shame and rage.

"You shall marry her again to-morrow, or I'll leave you to starve!"

"Thanks," said Wilfred, airily; "but the threat is needless. I happen to understand the marriage laws rather better than your lordship, and so know that as Katy believed me to be Wilfred Browne (the name I gave on the occasion) the ceremony was perfectly binding. There is another slight impediment—my wife has left me."

"What?"

"I mean it. She took every word I said for Gospel, poor child, and when I got home—if those miserable Clapham diggings deserve the name—last night, she was gone."

## CHAPTER VI.

SHE who had once been Kathleen Vernon possessed none of the courage and endurance of her half-sister; she was one of those fragile, gentle creatures who are fair to lean on someone all their life; she had leant on Dorothy till she went to Boulogne, and her first prop never failed her; Adeline Wilmot was the second; Wilfred Browne otherwise Crofton her last.

Poor child! She had simply worshipped him, and when he had torn the veil away and shown himself in his true colours the poor little thing was well-nigh heart broken.

Her one thought was to leave him; she was not Fred's wife, therefore she had no right to stay in those dreary suburban lodgings which seemed so unhomelike after the pleasant rooms at Mayfield, she must go away and earn her own living.

Poor little girl! She never thought of going back to Dorothy. Katy had quick perceptions concerning those she loved and all that affected

them, also three months of constant intercourse with Fred had opened her eyes considerably. She knew more of good and evil than she had ever done before; she knew that though utterly blameless if her story were known she would yet be a disgrace to her sister, might even lead to Dorothy's losing her hard-earned post at Thornton High School if she attempted to take refuge with her.

Kathleen had forsaken her sister in the heyday of her happiness. She would not go back to her now with her miserable story.

Perhaps when she was dying she might send for Dorothy, dear Princess Dorothy, who was so brave and strong; she could face death more boldly if those faithful arms were round her; but while she lived she must bear her burden alone.

It was a November day—a grey, typical November day, and it seemed to Kathleen her life was as dull and leaden as the sky.

She had taken nothing away with her from Clapham. She had two sovereigns in her purse; they would keep her a little while.

Of the time when they were gone she never thought, her one desire was to walk on and on until she was tired—so very tired and weary that when she laid her aching head down to rest sleep would surely come to her and banish the memory of her misery.

She seemed to have walked miles, and yet she had not even crossed the bridge which divides London proper from "the Surrey side."

At last she came to the great river, which she had used to think so pleasant when she saw it at Thornton in the summer sunshine, and which looked so angry and troubled now she gazed at it in the gathering gloom of the November afternoon.

She walked hurriedly on; she dared not look at the water, the longing to end her sorrows in its still cold depths was so strong. She went on and on, almost too heart-sick and confused, poor child, to notice what was coming. Suddenly she heard voices calling to her to stop.

A whirl of faces seemed to dance before her, and then she felt first a sharp keen pain, then nothing more. She had been knocked down by a passing hansom; and though the driver pulled up with all possible speed one of the horse's hoofs had bruised her, and she was stunned by the fall.

A gentleman sprang hastily from the cab. He seemed hardly to heed the driver's explanation; it was not his fault. The young lady had run right under the horse's feet, and so on.

"It's no use arguing about whose fault it was," Captain Crofton said, gravely, "the thing is to repair the damage. There's your fare. I must stop here and try to see what can be done for the poor girl."

A policeman came up.

"It couldn't have been helped, sir," he said, "your man drew up as soon as he saw her. I had been watching her for some time she seemed almost dazed, as if she'd no idea where she was going. I'd half a mind to speak to her before."

"Is there a hospital nearer than St. Thomas's?"

"There's a small one close by, sir, managed by Sisters. They've a ward for accidents."

"Can we get her there?"

Kindly hands had fetched a stretcher, and on this the girl's still white form had been stretched. Two men volunteered as bearers, the policeman acted as guide, and Denis Crofton brought up the rear.

The hospital was—as the officer had said—close at hand, and it was happily one of those institutions which are absolutely free.

There was an empty bed in the accident ward, and this was allotted to the poor wail.

Captain Crofton recompensed the bearers and the policeman, then he waited himself to hear the doctor's verdict. He knew that morally he was innocent of all wrong, and yet he could not forget that he had been in the cab which caused the accident.

Perhaps Denis Crofton was unusually gentle and considerate in his thoughts of women, because since his talk with his father that morning at

breakfast he had been over to the Hermitage, and pleaded with Dorothy Vernon for her love.

And Dorothy had not refused him. She told him frankly she cared for him, more than it was in her nature to care for anyone; but that until the mystery of her sister's fate was solved she could never think of love or marriage. She told him Katy's story, and showed him the snap-shot photograph forwarded from America.

Denis felt his heart sink within him, for the resemblance to his brother Wilfred was so marvellous he could not doubt that he was Kathleen's lover; but Denis said nothing to Dorothy of his fears, he only told her he would go to London and make inquiries of his brother (an artist too), if he knew anyone called Browne, and who had been sketching in France in the early summer. He said that Wilfred had been in Boulogne in May so he might be able to assist them.

Captain Crofton had no thought of deceiving Dorothy. He meant to find out his brother and tell him his marriage was discovered, offering to settle an income on him if he would reform and treat his wife decently.

This was the cause of Denis going to London so hurriedly. He had left the Bury without even asking his father if he intended answering Wilfred's letter in person. His one desire was to see his brother before Lord Crofton had an interview with him. Wilfred was an arrant coward, and he might persist in denying his marriage just because he feared his father's anger.

It seemed to Denis he waited hours before the house surgeon came to him.

"It is a dangerous case, but not absolutely hopeless. She is quite unconscious, and likely to remain so. I think you said you had no knowledge of her friends?"

"None at all. I never set eyes on her till she was picked up insensible after the accident."

"She is a lady," said the surgeon, quietly, judging by her dress and general appearance, she wears a wedding-ring; but there are no papers in her pocket. Her purse has about two pound ten in it, and her clothes are marked 'K. Vernon,' that is the only clue. Vernon is an uncommon name, it might lead to her identity."

"K. Vernon!" Captain Crofton almost gasped.

"A friend of mine, Miss Vernon, has a sister called Kathleen. Might it not be the same?"

"Possibly; but this girl is married," and he said something in a lower tone, which made Denis grow pale with an unutterable dread.

It was late now, past seven o'clock, but Denis never hesitated. He sent off a telegram to Dorothy with this message,—

"Come to London to-morrow. I will meet the ten-thirty train at King's-cross. Important news."

He could not have got down to Crofton Bury in time to call at the Hermitage before eleven o'clock, at which hour a visit would have amazed the whole household. He could not write to Dorothy, because the solitary daily post did not reach King's Crofton till after ten o'clock, when she would miss the London express. The telegram would not cause her a sleepless night, it would reach Mitchin after office hours, and be sent on by mounted messenger the first thing in the morning, in time for her to drive the long six miles and catch the train he specified.

He felt certain that Dorothy would come, and he longed for yet dreaded the meeting with her. He felt so miserable since it was his brother who had caused all her terrible suspense. Would she ever forgive him? Was it in woman's nature? And yet he hoped she would not punish him for Wilfred's sin. There was about Dorothy such a nobility of mind. She had such a broad, generous nature, he could not help hoping she would be his wife, even though he was Wilfred's brother.

Captain Crofton had managed to intimate to the house surgeon at St. Gabriel's that he wished to defray all the expenses of Kathleen's illness, so that she was no charge to the hospital, and he went round to inquire for the latest news of her before going to King's-cross where Dorothy's train was due soon after eleven. Katy still lived, and they had not given up hope of her, though another life—that of her little premature infant—had begun and ended in the silent night.

Dorothy came. She wore a plain black dress and close-fitting bonnet, looking in them to Denis more beautiful than ever; but her face was very white and sad.

"You have found her?"

That was all she said, and that only when Denis had piloted her to a deserted end of the platform, where they seemed as much alone as if a crowd had not been within sight.

"I think so—she is alive; but I have had news for you. As I was driving in a hansom cab last night a girl passed just under the horse's feet. She was tired and half-dazed, and so did not hear the warnings of the passers-by; she was picked up insensible. She has blue eyes and golden hair. They tell me at the hospital her clothes are marked 'K. Vernon,' and it seemed to me worth sending for you on the chance."

"And she is dying?"

"I hope not—I think not. She was alive this morning. We will go to her soon. Oh, Dorothy, will you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she asked in surprise; "why you are not to blame. Had you been driving yourself even the accident would not have been your fault."

"There is something more—I have no proof. I have no real grounds for the fear; but I have a nameless dread that 'Fred Browne' is my half-brother, Wilfred Crofton."

"Why?"

"I can hardly explain. He is an amateur artist, and he was in Boulogne at the time you mention. Then as a boy he was called 'Fred,' and I know in travelling he often drops the name of Crofton. 'Browne' would be a natural alias, for his mother was called so before her marriage."

There was a breathless silence. Then the woman said brokenly,—

"He married her as Fred Browne. Oh! speak. Is she not his wife?"

"Assuredly, unless she knew it was an assumed name. Now we will go to St. Gabriel's."

And while he waited in the little office-like room one of the Sisters came to tell him that Miss Vernon had recognised their patient, and that the poor girl had recovered consciousness for one instant, and tears of joy had filled her eyes as she looked at her sister's face.

"She may recover now," said the white-capped sister, "before I doubted it. She seemed to me as though some terrible sorrow had broken down her strength even before the accident."

And Denis left the hospital with but one aim, to "have it out" with his brother Wilfred.

## CHAPTER VII. AND LAST.

LORD CROFTON sat looking as a man overwhelmed with shame and despair. He could not in the least understand if Wilfred regretted his poor young wife; if he repented the cruel falsehood which had driven her forth a lonely wanderer. But he did know, and it galled him to the quick, that a son of his, bearing his name, had treated cruelly and disgracefully the woman he had sworn to love and cherish.

There was a dead silence after Wilfred's rather theatrical statement; then the door was opened by his landlady, who announced "Captain Crofton."

"Goodness," cried Wilfred bitterly, "is this a pre-conceived meeting. Am I to be tried and judged by a family tribunal of two?"

Denis crossed to his father's side. He calmly ignored Wilfred.

"I did not expect to find you here," he said affectionately. "I have some very disagreeable business to transact. Shall I wait till you have left?"

"You had better speak out," said Lord Crofton sadly; "nothing you can tell me about him can be worse than what he has confessed. He was married last April, and by a cruel lie he has driven his wife into the street, believing herself nameless."

"That is what I have come for," said Denis. "I don't suppose Wilfred cares what has become of Kathleen, but I am here to tell him. She was



knocked down by a cab last night, and now lies dangerously ill in a London hospital; her child—born prematurely—only breathed and died."

Wilfred covered his face with his hands. Perhaps he felt troubled at last.

"How in the world did you discover her?" asked Lord Crofton.

"When I asked Dorothy Vernon to be my wife, she said she could never think of love or marriage until she had found her sister. She told me Kathleen's story and showed me a photograph of her husband—it was Wilfred's face; but I hoped against hope I was mistaken."

"My wife was Kathleen Vernon," admitted Wilfred, "but you can't know her sister; she is a miserable old maid who earns a pittance as a schoolmistress."

"Dorothy Vernon is twenty-two," replied Lord Crofton, "and one of the loveliest women I ever met. She is the niece and heiress of my old friend Mrs. Percival; and if Denis wins her for his wife I shall be thankful."

"And Kathleen," demanded Wilfred sharply, "surely she would share the fortune?"

"Kathleen inherits nothing," said Denis; "but for her sake I shall be willing to help my father to settle an adequate income on you."

Katy came slowly back from the gates of the dark valley, but before she left the hospital Wilfred went abroad. Lord Crofton decided that he would never get on in England, and with great difficulty got him a post in Melbourne. If the accounts of him were good, in a year's time Katy would join him, till then she would live at the Bury with his parents.

They met once—husband and wife—in the quiet precincts of the hospital. No one ever knew what passed at that interview, but Katy told her sister afterwards she thought Fred loved her still, and it was not his fault that Lord Crofton and his brother were so hard on him.

Dorothy bit her lip. The past weeks had taught her many things; amongst others that her little sister would never again see with her eyes or think with her judgment. Dorothy knew perfectly the generous treatment Wilfred had received from his family; knew too, in her heart, that he was, and always would be, found wanting.

When Katy was established at the Bury Denis walked over to the Hermitage one bright winter's day and pleaded his cause again with Dorothy.

"My darling, only trust yourself to me and I will prove to you a man can be true and faithful though he is Wilfred's brother."

"I never meant to marry," said Dorothy, slowly. "I thought I should live out my life alone, or spend it taking care of Katy; but she does not want me now."

"And I do."

"And I love you. Do you know, Denis, I used to think married women had a very dull monotonous time of it, and that to have an independent career was far better, but now I would rather be your wife than a Royal Princess."

"You will always be a princess to me," he answered. "Katy's old name for you just suits you—Princess Dorothy!"

They were married in January, and not very long after the news came that Wilfred Crofton had succumbed to an attack of fever. His wife and mother mourned him very truly, and quite persuaded themselves he had been sinned against rather than sinning.

Katy stayed on at the Bury, a kind of adopted child to its owners; but Lord Crofton never loved her as well as he loved her sister. To him Denis was the happiest man in England because he had won for his wife a woman who was strong and beautiful, fair and true.

"PRINCESS DOROTHY."

[THE END.]

THE Siamese have such a superstitious dislike of odd numbers that they studiously strive to have in their houses an even number of windows, doors, rooms, closets, etc.

#### A MOST USEFUL ARTICLE.

PAPER pulp is one of the most useful articles within the reach of mankind. Mixed with glue and plaster of Paris or Portland cement, it is the best thing to stop cracks and breaks in wood. Paper pulp and plaster alone should be within the reach of every housekeeper. The pulp must be kept in a close-stoppered bottle in order that the moisture may not evaporate. When required for use, make it of the consistency of thin gruel with hot water; add plaster of Paris to make it slightly pasty, and use it at once. For leakages around pipes, to stop the overflow of water in stationary washstands where the bowl and the upper slab join it is invaluable. Used with care, it will stop small leaks in iron pipes, provided the water can be shut off long enough to allow it to set. Around the empty pipe wrap a single thickness or two of cheesecloth just wide enough to cover the break, then apply the compound, pressing it in place and making an oval of it somewhat after the fashion of lead-pipe joining, only larger. The strength of this paste, when once it is thoroughly hardened, is almost beyond belief. The bit of cheesecloth prevents any clogging of the pipe by the paste working through the cracks. An iron pipe that supplied a household with water had a piece broken out by freezing. The piece was put in place, bound with a strip of muslin, then thoroughly packed with paper pulp and Portland cement, and was, to all appearances, as good as new. Paper pulp and fine sawdust boiled together for hours and mixed with glue dissolved in linseed oil makes a perfect filling for cracks in floors. It may be put on and left until partly dry, then covered with paraffin and smoothed with a hot iron. The surface, if properly managed, is equal to a polished wax floor. Almost every day new uses for paper pulp are suggested.

#### CURIOUS CHINESE CUSTOM.

WHEN a son is born to the daughter of a Chinese woman the grandmother is obliged by custom to send a number of presents to the new comer. During the first three days after the child's birth she must put in a pot having a nozzle one pound of cooked pork and twelve boiled eggs without their shells. She then wraps the pot in red, the colour of joy, and sticks in its nozzle a branch of pomegranate, suggesting fruitfulness; and she puts the whole into the centre of a large basket, surrounding it with a hundred ducks' eggs and a hundred hens' eggs, all uncooked. To this the aunts and cousins, friends and neighbours, add presents of pork and vermicelli. The sending of such an offering does not end the maternal grandmother's duties. When the infant is a month old preparations are made to shave his head for the first time. Elaborate preparations for this event must be made by the maternal grandmother. She must then present to her grandson at least four jars of bean catsup, one jar of sugar, one jar of dried fruit, a primer, an inkstand, and two pens, two cakes of ink, five hats, twelve sorts of garments, two scarfs in which he may be tied upon his mother's back, two razors, two cotton rolls ready for spinning and two eggs coloured red. The sweets are for the use of those who take care of him; and the primer, pens and ink are to encourage him to make an early beginning in his literary career, and the remainder are for immediate service. With the razors his head is shaven in spots, many little tufts of his black hair being left to prestage the number of trunks his future bride will require for packing her trousseau. The two cotton rolls serve as a sponge to wash his little pate, and the two red eggs are rubbed gently over it. In order to collect these things the grandmother is frequently obliged to practice severe personal economy. Then, should the child prove to be a girl, much of her labour is wasted, and must be repeated until a boy has been welcomed in her daughter's house.

#### AS IT FELL UPON A DAY.

##### CHAPTER VII.

RACHEL's heart was beating almost furiously as she ran away from Giles Hamilton, and passed down towards Victoria-station.

She had managed to hold herself quietly and coldly when she was speaking to him, but it had been a tremendous effort, and now that she was alone she felt herself trembling in every limb, as though each nerve had been strained to its utmost extent.

The sort of exhilaration that the morning sunshine had given her, and the girlish glee with which she had determined to set the conventions at defiance, and sail forth for this visit with Bastian, went from her a little in this moment.

She was so angry with herself that this man should still have the power to move her so deeply—she coloured hotly as she hurried along, as she remembered her weakness; it was so contrary to all she had desired, all she had resolved upon; she caught herself wishing with half a sigh that she might never see Giles Hamilton again; and yet there came a pang of regret even at the thought.

In her usual headstrong way Rachel suddenly determined to cease thinking over the matter for the moment.

"I came out to enjoy myself, and I *will* enjoy myself; I am an exceedingly silly tiresome person. I am always trying to spoil things for myself. Now for my omnibus and for Bastian's office. How I long to see his grave face full of surprise when I arrive."

Her spirits rose again as she found herself in the heart of the station bustle, accosted by half-a-dozen omnibus conductors who might well have bewildered her by the various names of their various destinations.

"I want to go to the city—to the Mansion-house," she remarked, in answer to one more pertinent inquirer, fixing hastily on the one place in the city she knew by name.

"Ere yer are, miss, houtside, that's right hold tight," and giving a stamp of his foot on the step, the big conveyance lumbered out of the yard with Rachel only half way mounted to the top.

There was really nothing half so beautiful, she said to herself several times as they trundled along, as sitting on the outside of an omnibus on a lovely spring morning.

Her charming face under the simple sailor hat grew brilliantly pretty. She laughed every now and then as some grand and pompous-looking carriage rolled swiftly past the omnibus; they reminded her of her own magnificent carriage, and made the jest of the moment more delightful.

"I consider the City a heavenly place," Rachel said to herself, as by degrees they reached the Strand, and crawled into Fleet-street.

She modified this a little when a young man came and shared her narrow seat, and eyed her smart neat gown and beautiful face with an admiration that was too evident.

Fortunately for her comfort Rachel had seated herself immediately behind the coachman, and had been much amused and enlightened by his comical remarks *en route*.

With half an eye, as he would have put it himself, the omnibus Jehu had seen that this sweet-looking girl was no ordinary fare, and he at once constituted himself a sort of protector as well as a cicerone.

By what means it is not quite evident, he managed to dispossess Rachel's admirer of any comfort in his seat, and in a little while the young man vanished.

It was like parting from an old friend when Rachel had to say "Good-morning," and descend from her perch at last.

She gave the driver half-a-crown, a gift that made him whistle, and when she was safe on the ground again she considered it wiser to put herself into a hansom, and thus be conveyed to the office of the big shipping firm over which Bastian really presided.

The girl was just a little worried and tired with the bustle and noise of the traffic, and it was with a sense of great relief that she passed between the big doors and asked for Mr. Lithgow.

All the old spirit of fun broke out, however, as she was shown into Bastian's room. As soon as they were alone she danced across the floor.

"Now, aren't you surprised?" she demanded, her whole being a sunbeam of loveliness and laughter, "were you ever so surprised in all your life before? Confess, Bastian dear, did you not think it was a ghost when I walked in? Oh! I simply can't tell you how frightened you looked!"

She flung herself into the one arm-chair, and took off her hat, while Bastian, having risen, stood and stared at her as if to confirm her sentence, and transform her into some spirit from another world.

"I am indeed astonished," he murmured, as the first bewilderment passed away, and the tangible exquisite delight of her living self was brought to him with a rush, "my dear child, whatever has brought you here! Are you alone? do you want me?" his voice was hurried, even anxious.

Rachel laughed deliciously.

"Yes; you dear old Mr. Catechizer. I am alone, and I do want you! Do you suppose I should have taken the trouble to come tearing all down here on the top of an omnibus if I had not wanted to see you very much?"

Bastian's grave face had a glow of colour. Ah! how exquisitely sweet her merry words were to him, even though he knew they meant nothing.

He was quite aware that her great need of him would only resolve itself into some petulant or possibly inconsequent prettiness nevertheless, it was in such moments as these that Bastian Lithgow really lived.

As he glanced at her lovely laughing face, and recalled her last words, however, he frowned suddenly.

"Rachel, you have not," he was beginning; but she interrupted him swiftly.

Spinning her sailor hat across the space that separated them she clapped her hands.

"Yes, I have—I have—I have! I came down here all the way on top of an omnibus—at least, not all the way! I took a cab at the Mansion House as there were so many men, I felt quite frightened. Oh, Bastian, I did enjoy it so much; there was only one thing wanting to make it perfect; I longed, I *ached* for Uncle Hubert or Lady Castletown to have been somewhere about, and have seen me. Now, Bastian," as he stood turning her hat about in his hands tenderly but saying never a word. "Now, Bastian, you are not going to be horrid, and scold—are you?"

"I am always horrid, aren't I, little Rachel?" he asked, looking up at her with his own rare and most beautiful smile.

Rachel responded promptly.

"You are very often very horrid; but you can be an angel, too, if you like. Be an angel now, Bastian. I have come down here to enjoy myself," she was on her feet again fluttering round the big room like a butterfly, "how interesting it is," she exclaimed, "and how mysterious. Bastian do you really understand all those charts and things? You know you are awfully clever; I shall have to sit down and write to dear 'bunny' when I get home, and tell her she has no idea what a clever son she has got. You are so give me lunch, you know," she suddenly cried, sitting back to him. "I am so hungry now; I could eat a whole loaf; you are to take a holiday for once. Are you so very busy to-day, Bastian?"

"I don't think it would make much difference if I were," he answered, laughingly, "since your ladyship has come and has teased her orders."

"Of course you will send me away if I am a nuisance," Rachel said, quite gravely; but her eyes smiled; "only you will give me a bun to eat before I go. I told Nell I should not be back to lunch."

"Ah!" Bastian put her hat on the table. "I want to know what use it is providing you with a companion if she does not go about with you."

"And I," observed Rachel, impertinently, "want to know what business it is of anybody whether I go about with a companion or whether I do not? I am a married woman remember."

Bastian had turned away. Even this laughing allusion to her exact position made him wince. Neither time nor custom had yet healed the wound this child's unhappy marriage had brought to his strong loving honest heart.

"It will be a brave person who will attempt to control Rachel Lady Castletown," he said, lightly enough, as he touched a bell and turned back to meet her eyes.

"At present I know of one very brave person who not only attempts, but succeeds," Rachel cried, gaily. "Oh! I don't pretend you don't know who I mean, you tyrant!"

The opening of the door lashed her words into silence; her eyes, curious to learn everything about Bastian's office and home of work, gazed with much interest on the young man who answered Mr. Lithgow's summons. Rachel, though she had never seen a more striking looking personality than this clerk of Bastian's, she immediately began to speak about him as Mr. Lithgow, having stated he was going out, and having given sundry orders, the young man withdrew.

"What a handsome head, Bastian," she said, "what is he? I mean of what nationality. I mean he looks quite Oriental."

"And is so on his mother's side," Bastian answered. "I believe he comes of an old Portuguese family through his mother. His father was a most decided Englishman, rejoicing in the unusual name of Robinson. He is a clever young fellow, and has been with us ever since he was quite a lad. He supports his mother!"

Rachel was pointing on her sailor hat again.

"You are going to give me a nice lunch, I hope," she said; and then she asked him if her hat was askew, and tried to catch a reflection of herself in the high mirror, a feat she could only do by standing on a chair. "I feel quite interested in that young man, Bastian," she said, as he helped her down again. "I think I have a decided penchant for dark-skinned people, they always look romantic and sympathetic, like heroes in books or plays."

Bastian laughed.

"I think I had better let you see some of the other clerks," he said, "so that you shall not run away with the idea that there are any definite romances knocking about in the City."

"I know whom I should like to see," Rachel said, suddenly. "Nell's father, would that be possible, Bastian?"

"Quite possible if he is in the house, but I have half an idea that he has gone out. I know there was an important appointment for him to keep this morning."

On inquiry this idea was proved to be a fact. Mr. Foster was not in his room, and was not expected to return before the afternoon.

"I am sorry," Rachel said, and she spoke with real regret. "I should like to have talked to him a little bit about Nell," she explained further as Bastian led her down the stairs: "do you know I am a little unhappy about Nell, well perhaps not unhappy," she amended, "but troubled! Have you noticed, Bastian, how tired and worried Nell has seemed to be lately? I believe it is all because of her step-mother. She will go home and spend long days in her father's house, and she always returns looking exhausted. Last night she was quite pale and ill. I told her I did not see the necessity of continually paying these visits to her father's home when all she got in return was worry and unhappiness."

"I suppose she feels it is her duty to go," Bastian said, slowly. He could not have told why, but Rachel's words caused him a little touch of uneasiness. He had been instrumental in placing Eleanor Foster in Lady Castletown's household, and therefore he was responsible for all that came.

He had himself remarked that the girl had seemed very quiet and languid when he had been there, and had Rachel's spirits been less buoyant than they were he would have felt that Miss Foster's companionship might have been depressing to the young widow. But Rachel's real

attachment to Eleanor speedily set any idea of this sort on one side.

"I sometimes think," Rachel chatted on, as he put her into a hansom and they were driven to a restaurant, "I sometimes think that there may be something else besides her father's marriage to make Nell unhappy, and yet if there has been a love story I think she would have told me," and then Rachel checked herself; "but why should she have told me? Nell is just the sort of girl to keep that sort of thing to herself. Bastian, I believe I am right—there is something else;" all the gaiety went out of Rachel in this moment, her own cruel blighted youth cropped up in her mind to make her sad and sombre. "Poor Nell," she said, softly under her breath.

Bastian was still conscious of that strange uneasiness. "You may be right, Rachel," he answered slowly, "but, as I have told you many times, I knew very little about Miss Foster. I was instrumental in getting her her start as a governess, but I interested myself in her entirely for her father's sake. If I confess the truth, I had imagined there might have been an attachment between Miss Foster and Philip Robinson, they have known one another all their lives, but—"

"But there is no 'but,' Bastian. I feel sure you must be right. That is why I took such an interest in that handsome dark young man, it was a sort of intuition. I shall—" Rachel had been quite excited, but she checked herself and broke into a laugh as she caught Bastian's expression. "How like me—rushing into a certainty without knowing a thing—very likely they just hate one another. Perhaps one day Nell will tell me all about it. I, of course, have also imagined she had had some romance, but I associated it with that time when she was abroad."

Bastian turned and looked half puzzled into Rachel's face as the cab stopped and they alighted.

"I never knew Miss Foster had been abroad, Rachel," he said, and once again he was conscious of a touch of annoyance.

He disliked mystery, and always gave and demanded absolute straightforwardness. He certainly had never heard that Foster's daughter had been abroad. He did not know that it would have made any difference to him in bringing her to Rachel's notice; but still it might have done so. In any case he did not quite understand why he had not been told.

"I had no idea she had been abroad," he repeated.

Rachel made a move at him.

"You are a great personage, but you don't know everything, you see," she remarked with her own delightful rudeness. "Now please leave off frowning about poor Nell, and come and order my lunch. I want a whole chicken, please. What does it matter Bastian, whether Nell has been abroad or not?" she queried a moment later a little impatiently; "she is a dear sweet girl, and I love her. That is quite enough for me!"

How little Rachel thought that the time was close at hand when she would think very differently on this point!

The luncheon was made a memorable, an enchanting hour to Sebastian Lithgow. He could hardly realize that this was indeed he who sat there facing that bright vision of girlish beauty; that her voice, now caressing, now petulant, sometimes half shrewish, was really her voice and not the echo of some dream; and that the delicious entrain that filled his veins at this suggestion of a possible dual life with Rachel was not the mere stirring of his nerves at the vigour and vividness of his imaginations.

There was pain beneath all the joy for him. Her absolute unconcern, the certainty with which she treated him, the evidence of her feeling of *bon camaraderie* was so definitely antithetical to any other deeper or more precious sentiment.

Nevertheless, he determined not to see the shadow in this moment. He abandoned himself to the intoxicating delight of her presence.

He filled his memory with a store of new beauties revealed in her sweet lips, her big lano-



cent eyes, her charming voice, and her beautiful slender body.

He would recall them one by one when she was gone. They would be myths; but they would be all he could claim; all she would ever give him.

His own heart, tuned as it was to the burden of a love that was almost bewilderingly great, might have let him fathom some of the unrest that possessed her to-day, some of the excitement that made the colour rush over her face every now and then, and brought a little nervous thrill into her laughter.

A woman in Bastian's place would have been at once that Rachel's mental condition was not normal, that there was some cause at work in her heart to add the extra brilliancy to her look and manner; but the man sitting opposite to her saw nothing but her bewitching self; knew nothing but that she was to him at once the glory and the sorrow of his life.

"I had to come and look after you—you have never been to see me—oh! for ages," she said, as she played with her dainty luncheon. Her appetite had been quite fictitious. "When will you come, Bastian? It is nasty of you to leave me and forget me. I shall complain to Aunt Marian about her boy, you see if I don't."

Bastian only smiled. It was growing near the time when they must part, and the ecstasy was beginning to fleet away also.

"I never forget you, Rachel, dear," he said very quietly; "but I have been so busy."

"Oh! I know you when you begin to make excuses you will never end. You must come; do you hear you must! I cannot get along without you. I am going to begin and have some dinner parties now. I shall want you to come to each one!"

"Impossible,"

The word escaped Bastian almost hotly; he hastened to explain as he saw her startled look.

"I mean only, Rachel, dear, that it would be better not. People would think it strange if I am perpetually seen in your house, you know."

Bastian did not find it so easy, somehow, to continue his explanation.

Rachel had interrupted him however.

"Strange!" she repeated, "well, I must say that is ridiculous! Why, aren't you just like my brother, and what is more natural than you should help me in my entertainments?"

She rose as she spoke, and the look that had come over his face was utterly lost to her. They walked out to find a hansom.

"I should go back as I came; but I promised to go to some tea this afternoon, and I have not time. Now, Bastian, you see what will happen if you don't come to me. I shall come to you, and then," she smiled at him, "you are such a dear," she said, as she gave him her hand. "You wanted to scold ever so much, and you didn't. I do love you, Bastian; but not when you don't do what I want you to do," she added, severely; and then she waved her hand to him, and she was gone, leaving him to walk through the crowded streets of the City in the bright spring sunshine a man without a heart or sense of life, since both had gone with her.

In such a moment as this there might have broken from Sebastian Lithgow's love-crushed mind those bitter words the poet sings so wearily, with so much hopelessness and depression,—

"Let us go hence and rest; she will not love,  
She shall not hear us if we sing thereof,  
Nor see love's ways, how sore they are and steep,  
Come hence, let be, He still; it is enough.  
Love is a barren one, bitter and deep;  
And though she saw all Heaven in flower above, she  
will not love."

## CHAPTER VIII.

GILES HAMILTON walked on mechanically after he had passed that big house in Eaton-square. He had no knowledge how far he had walked when recollection returned to him completely.

It was not often that any trick or turn of Fate caught him unprepared, he had had too long and close an intimacy with a life of chance to leave himself unarmed, at a rule, for every risk, every

possibility that might follow on any doubtful action.

For once, however, he was taken wholly by surprise. When he suddenly realised what had happened he found he had progressed a good distance; it would have taken him probably about ten minutes' sharp walking to retrace his steps, and look once again into the windows of Rachel's big pompous-looking house.

His first inclination was to do this; but even as he turned he turned back again, and walked onwards.

Such a journey would be useless, it would tell him nothing unless, indeed, he were to knock boldly at the door, and ask to see Miss Foster.

There was not a single doubt in his mind that the face at the window looking out at him in such a set look of dumb misery was indeed no other than Eleanor Foster, the girl who out of all his many butterfly intrigues had caused him the most annoyance.

Even of late when he had imagined her safely dead and gone the memory of this one particular bit of "foily" had had enough annoyance in it to make his handsome brows meet in a frown, and his lips frame themselves to utter a curse on himself as well as on the girl.

Yes; he had believed her dead these many months; and he had given a sigh of relief as a funeral service to the unhappy end of a life that had been young and bright till it had happened to cross his path.

He had not gone very closely into the matter of her death it was true. In fact, as he remembered now, he had merely supposed it from the friendly words she had written him in her last letter, but as no news or sign of life had come from Eleanor all this long time he had very quickly permitted himself to accept most acquiescently the pleasant fact that one difficulty at least had been removed from his path.

He had had from the first more trouble with Eleanor than with any of the many others with whom he had amused himself.

He was not unaccustomed to being taken seriously. His flirtations, in fact, in his own world had all more or less been tinged with seriousness, as for instance in the case of Rachel Huntley.

But when it came to "foilies" to those sort of affairs which belonged to the other side of his life—well, Giles flattered himself he managed to steer his way through them all pretty cleverly.

His mistake had been in classing Eleanor Foster in with the innumerable girls who had been as content to flirt and amuse themselves with him, as he with them.

He ought to have known (how often he had said it to himself afterwards) that a woman of the definite middle class was the very last creature he ought to have paid any of his meaningless attentions to.

He never, in fact, could quite tell why he had been so foolish about Eleanor. She had never been pretty, strictly speaking, although when he had first come across her she had had a distinct attraction with her soft brown hair, her shapely figure, and her modest bearing.

It had been perhaps her very modesty and her coldness towards him that had drawn him on. The desire for a little amusement in a dull moment that had determined him to break down this coldness which his worldly knowledge assured him was only assumed. His task had been easy, and Eleanor's love, when it came, had been sufficiently interesting to have allowed him to go a little further with her than he had certainly intended to go. It was quite inconceivable to him now why he should have been so foolish. He had soon tired of the game, had soon realised his mistake; in fact, looking back now in this moment of consternation, uneasiness, and surprise there was nothing in the man's mind for the girl he had so wantonly wronged but hatred—hatred borne of fears, of a sudden anger against himself and against her.

Eleanor Foster was alive!

Eleanor Foster was for some strange reason an inmate of Rachel Lady Castletown's house! These two things in themselves were sufficient to put on one side all the satisfaction, the hope, and what he was pleased to call the love that his

renewed intercourse with Rachel had brought into his life.

The memory of Rachel's agitation, the knowledge that his power over her was not utterly destroyed, the rush of delight that had followed on this discovery, all slipped from him again as he walked slowly on; he was conscious of nothing but that his luck, that had seemed a moment before to be so wonderful—an strangely golden, was destined perhaps to be dashed from his hold altogether.

His handsome face had a changed worn look when he finally reached his club. He had been so content to take things lightly, and things had, for some charmed reason, always fallen lightly at his touch, that his present time of discomfort affected him deeply.

When he had risen this morning he had thought his burden sufficiently heavy. Then it had been the old story of debt and difficulty, and no road left open to him to steer him out of it.

His meeting with Rachel had seemed to shift that burden from him a little, and now as he sat pretending to read a newspaper he had a sort of fierce rage upon him that so great so wonderful a solution to all his difficulties should be jeopardized and made possibly impossible through Eleanor Foster.

His feelings towards her were definite enough; he hated her. All the strength of his mean, most selfish nature rushed out in one big flood to make this hatred almost overwhelming. The worst of it was, he was powerless to know what step to take.

As yet Rachel's house was not open to him. Were he a regular visitor the circumstances would, of course, be quite easy. He could obtain speech with Eleanor, he could silence her without exposing himself to any danger; but as it was—

The man held his breath suddenly. Should he write to Eleanor? What was her present attitude towards him? Had she had intentions to avenge herself? Why had she allowed him to be deceived, to have imagined her dead?

She had never given him an idea of fierceness or of a revengeful spirit. She had accepted the truth (when there was no possibility of deceiving her any longer) with rigid calmness, she had listened to his brutal plain-speaking in a sort of white silence, he remembered; yet these quiet self-contained women could be very dangerous sometimes.

How was he to approach her, to learn the truth? At all times in his life he had abhorred trouble and difficulty, and he had quite enough on his hands as it was, without this last cropping up to stand like a phantom in his path.

It was a new experience for him, selfish, splendid animal as he was, to feel that he had no appetite for food, to be too sick at heart and worried to care whether he was as handsome as ever, or whether his clothes were up to their old form of smartness.

If Eleanor Foster had ever prayed for revenge she was even in this very small way granted her request. Suffering is only comparative, and the sort of suspense and doubt and dread and sense of impending disaster in which Giles Hamilton lived in those few hours after he had caught sight of her face in the window of Rachel's house was about the worst kind of suffering that could be visited upon him.

He dragged himself in the early part of the afternoon to see his mother. He had pretty nearly drained her resources dry, and well as she loved him had almost worn her patience and generosity to a thread; but she was the only one to whom he could go, and, moreover, an idea came to him that it might be better to work his way to Rachel's intimate life through his mother than by his own individual effort.

Mrs. Hamilton of Corby Court had long ago seen the wisdom of cultivating the friendship of any young woman with money, and once given the suggestion that there was something definite to be hoped for from Lady Castletown she would leave no stone unturned to bring this conclusion about.

It was not, however, any difficulty in approaching or winning his way into Rachel's life that worked such worry on his brow this sunny spring



"MISS FOSTER, WHAT AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE!" CAPTAIN HAMILTON EXCLAIMED.

day. He was haunted by the remembrance of Eleanor Foster. At moments he half led himself to suppose that that white strained face at the window had been some myth, some vision, or wraith, called up, by what power he knew not, merely to remind him of a past and a most foolish episode; but then common sense returned to him and he knew again that such a vision was not possible, and that for good or ill the fact that Eleanor was an inmate of Lady Castletown's house remained indisputable.

Chance, always a favourable influence in this man's poor narrow selfish life, was once again destined to do Giles a good turn.

When his mother's house was reached he found her somewhat seriously indisposed. He was upset by this, not because he loved his mother so tenderly, but because he had such need of her. With his most caressing manner he did his best to beguile an hour away, and won from the invalid a tribute of deeper love and something like confidence.

He said nothing of his pressing troubles in this moment; but when he rose to go he knew well that the half-nervous fretful manner with which his mother had met him of late was utterly vanquished, and that she would be braced up henceforth to help him in every possible way, should his hopes and schemes of winning Rachel's money be dashed to the ground.

He left the house charged by his mother with a commission to go and carry her excuses to a certain old Hamilton relative to whom she had been under promise of spending an hour on this afternoon.

"I waited till you came, dear, because I thought you might find a moment in which to go to cousin Margaret's and explain that I am ill; she is so odd, you know, and hates to be sent telegrams. She has not seen you for a long time, Giles."

Mrs. Hamilton had paused a moment before continuing.

"But," she said, then with the faintest suggestion in her voice, "but she is always interested

in you, and she is old, and old people like to be remembered. I am very sorry not to go to-day, because I believe she has asked little Lady Castletown to tea on purpose to meet me."

A hot wave of colour had flushed into the man's face. He left his mother almost hurriedly and for the first time in his life found himself driving to the old cousin's old-fashioned house not unwillingly merely, but eagerly.

His heart beat high as he turned into Bryanston-square. In an instant he had caught sight of the Castletown barouche with its big splendid horses, its mourning liveries, and its immaculate servants waiting at the door.

Rachel was there already then, by what stroke of good luck should he just have happened to go to his mother this afternoon?

But for that timely visit he would never naturally have dreamed of coming here, and thus perhaps the biggest opportunity of all would have been lost to him.

He stopped his cab suddenly, and walked the rest of the way up to the house.

He was quick to see that the carriage was empty. Rachel was alone, perhaps, or his pulses thrilled with an excitement he had never felt before, or, perhaps, she was not alone, and once he was within he would come face to face with the girl in whose hands his future fate now lay. He had no settled plan what he should do, how he should act. When he met her, he must leave that to the condition of the circumstances.

His natural shrewdness seemed to give him one satisfaction; he felt sure that whatever position Eleanor Foster might hold in Lady Castletown's house, that the story of her brief sad association with himself had never been told.

Rachel's ingenuous face would have betrayed to him at once had she been made the recipient of that episode, and more than this, he felt assured Eleanor had confided the story of life to no one, for had it been otherwise, she would never have found a chance of becoming an inmate of Rachel's house.

Therefore whatever might or might not happen

after to-day, Hamilton said to himself confidently that he would have the first innings, and that it would be a strange thing indeed if he could not prove too subtle and clever for any move this girl might try to make.

"She has everything to lose, d——n her!" he said between his teeth as he approached the house, outwardly one of the most splendid specimens of English manhood that could be met with in a day's march.

The old smile had come back to his lips, the old *débonnaire* manner sat on his person.

As he passed Rachel's carriage he stopped involuntarily to admire the horses, thereby making his way straight to the coachman's heart.

Giles' admiration was very sincere, he was an expert judge in all horseflesh, and there was no flaw to be found in any of the animals in the Castletown stables.

The man's heart had a thrill of anticipatory pleasure as he glanced over the two magnificent bays.

As he stepped back to take a final look the door of his cousin's house opened suddenly, and a woman's figure passed hurriedly out.

It was Eleanor Foster sent to execute a commission for Rachel.

She did not realise at first who it was that stood in her path so smiling, so handsome, and yet in her eyes so overwhelmingly evil. As consciousness came to her she blanched to her very lips.

She had been for weeks preparing for this *rencontre*, now it was come, and she felt as if death itself could not be worse than the living embodiment of wickedness and cruelty that this man's whole being brought to her.

She stood almost clinging to the iron railings that guarded the step, while Captain Hamilton, giving a well-acted exclamation of surprised gladness, held out his hand.

"Miss Foster, what an unexpected pleasure—how long it is since I saw you. I am delighted to meet you again."

(To be continued.)





THE DOG LOOKED BACK AT DUDLEY WITH AN EXPRESSION OF ALMOST HUMAN INTELLIGENCE IN ITS EYES.

## THE GREYSTOKE MYSTERY.

CHAPTER VII.  
AN EARLY VISITOR.

VERA's impression was that she had seen an arm, clothed in the chints flowered dressing-gown her father usually wore, sweep forward and deliberately overturn the lamp, which was extinguished in falling; but it all happened so rapidly that she was bewildered, and her ideas were hazy and indistinct.

"Dear me, dear me!" muttered Mr. Graham, apparently groping about for some matches, "how could I have been so awkward! But you startled me, Vera, by springing in so suddenly. Where on earth are those vestas gone?"

It was some moments before he could find them, and meanwhile the study was in utter darkness. At last his search resulted in success, and he lighted a candle on the mantelpiece, which gave forth a dim and flickering flame that was not strong enough to penetrate to the corners of the room.

"Now," he said, seating himself in his arm chair, and his voice was a trifle uneasy, "tell me where you had been hiding!"

"Behind the curtains."

He started visibly.

"Have you been there long?"

"About five minutes, I should imagine. I heard you and my step-mother talking, and before I quite realized it I had also heard what you said. I had no intention of listening, papa, but I came round to the study window because I have been out, and I could not find any other way of entering the house."

"Well!" he said, harshly, "and pray what have you heard us say?"

Without a moment's hesitation she repeated the conversation, he listening very attentively, with his eyes fastened on her face. What his expression was she could not see, for his back was to the light; but after she finished speaking he remained

silent for a little while, apparently lost in deep thought.

"I daresay our words puzzled you," he said, at last, "and although I intended keeping our secret from you I think after all it is better for you to learn it. My dear, we are afraid my mind may give way, and that if people get to know of it I may be put in an asylum. There! that is why there is danger in Adela's opinion in your being at the Grange."

Vera's level brows were knitted together; she did not look altogether convinced.

"But that hardly amounts to a secret, papa! Madame herself hinted it to me the very night of my arrival."

"Did she! I was not aware of it, but I quite see her motive. She wished to prepare you for any emergencies. I have already had attacks of mania, during which I have been utterly irresponsible for my actions, and poor Adela has had a wretched life with me. It is for that reason we came to this lonely old place, for that reason we see no visitors, and for that reason we kept you at school so long. These attacks do not come on often, but I should not like you to see me under the influence of one, and I am liable to be stricken at any moment. That is why your step-mother does not wish you to see me unless she is by; she is afraid of your being alarmed, as you very naturally would be."

Vera's head was downcast, and her back to the door, so she did not see the figure of madame on the threshold, gazing at the tableau before her with eyes that literally blazed with wrath.

Mr. Graham, however, faced the door, and with one warning glance he waved his wife back. She hesitated, but finally withdrew very softly.

"I have frightened you, darling," whispered her father, remorsefully. "I would have spared you if I could, but after this it was impossible."

"Yes," she returned, mechanically. "It was better I should know."

"And now you shall decide for yourself whether you will leave the Grange or not. Your step-mother thinks it best that you should do so, but

I naturally prefer to have you here. Don't desert me, Vera darling!" he added, in a broken whisper while his head drooped forward until his cheek touched hers.

"I will not desert you," she returned; but an icy hand seemed gripping at her heart, and she shivered as she spoke.

"Brave girl!" he exclaimed, and he drew her to him in a close embrace, kissing her again and again with a certain fierceness that repelled her.

At last she forcibly drew herself from his arms and went upstairs, telling herself that the doubts still haunting her were wicked and without foundation. Her father's explanation had been the truth, and there was nothing else for her to know. Why, then, should she suspect that he had only given her half his confidence?

The bay of the blood-hound broke upon her musings—not an angry bay, but a series of short sharp barks, as if the animal were expressing delight at being set at liberty.

This recalled to her mind her father's proposed expedition, and the dark lantern which Madame had gone to fetch.

What could the two possibly want in the plantation at that hour of the night?

As she was winding up her watch before getting into bed she discovered that one of the little trinkets on the chain was missing—a golden heart, given her by Mabel Butler.

She recollected hearing something fall on the stairs as she came up—the heart no doubt—and she took her candle with the idea of going to look for it.

But the door would not open. She shook the handle, and turned it to no purpose—it was fastened on the outside!

Vera could hardly realise that this indignity had been put upon her, but when she tried her sitting-room door, and found it resisted all her efforts, there was no longer any room for doubt.

She was locked in!

As soon after it was light in the morning, she

sprang out of bed to try the doors again, and they both opened quite readily.

She could not help fancying that the business in the plantation, whatever its nature, had been at the bottom of her imprisonment.

Either madame or her father—perhaps both—had wished to guard against any chances of being interrupted.

She went to the window and threw it open, thus letting in a flood of warm sunshine. It was the first of May, and promised to be a typical May Day.

The sky was cloudless, dew sparkled on leaf and branch, floating cobwebs, diamond-gemmed, were in the air.

Vera determined to go for a walk, and in another few minutes was downstairs. She hesitated to attack the bolts and bars of the front door, and decided there must be a side entrance somewhere about, and this would be a good opportunity for finding it.

It proved to be at the end of a corridor quite close to her father's study, and so far as she could see there was not a single bolt to secure it, only a modern American patent lock, opening with a small latch-key.

She was on the point of raising the latch, when to her great surprise the door was opened from the outside, and she found herself confronted by a young man, who looked to the full as dumb-founded as herself at the encounter.

For a few seconds they stood regarding each other, he on the threshold, she a few paces away.

The stranger was a handsome man of thirty, or thereabouts, with bright bold dark eyes, and crisp short-cut hair.

He wore neither moustache nor whiskers. His boots were rather muddied, and his corduroy suit looked as if it had seen some service; over his arm a cloak or overcoat was thrown, and he carried a bag in his hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last. "I'm afraid I startled you."

"You did indeed," she rejoined with some dignity. "May I ask your business here?"

The inquiry seemed to confuse him, for he grew very red.

"I have come to stay for a few days with my cousin, Mrs. Graham," he replied, looking at her a trifle uneasily.

"Is it very early to arrive on a visit," she observed dully.

"Yes, I am aware of that, but I come so often that I feel myself quite at home, and free to do pretty much as I like. I have been over to Paris, and I only arrived at it—last night—too late to catch the last train on to Graystoke. So I slept at an hotel, and got up as soon as it was light and walked on here. Pray don't look at me with such suspicious eyes," he added, laughing.

"I assure you I am not a burglar, and have no felonious intent whatever. My name is Dudley Maddox—perhaps you have heard Adela speak of me?"

Vera shook her head; but she remembered that her step-mother's maiden name had been Maddox, and the young man's refined accent and manners went a long way towards convincing her that he was speaking the truth.

"I know who you are," he added, looking at her with unconcealed admiration. "You are so like your father that I could swear to your relationship anywhere. But I did not know you were home from school. How is it you left Miss Nicholson—the name was Nicholson, wasn't it—so suddenly?"

"I had very sufficient reasons for leaving."

"I beg your pardon?" he exclaimed, hastily. "I am afraid I asked a rude question, but your father has talked to me of you so often that I really fancied I knew you. I did not mean to be impertinent. Will you accept my apologies?"

Vera bowed without speaking.

The situation was an awkward one, but Mr. Maddox no longer seemed to find it so. He had completely recovered his self-possession, and now proceeded to take the little American key out of the lock, and put it back in his pocket. Vera noticed that it was attached to the end of his watch-chain.

"Were you going out for a walk?" he con-

tinued. "If you will allow me, I will accompany you; but first of all I will deposit my bag in the study. I am sure your father would forgive the liberty if he knew it; but he won't be down for another five or six hours, and we shall be back before then. We'll take Nero with us—he delights in a scamper, and it is only when there is no chance of meeting strangers that we can let him out, for he's a ferocious brute, and would take a bite out of a man's leg as soon as look at him."

Vera's last doubts were set at rest when she saw the bloodhound fawning round her new acquaintance in a manner that showed the two to be great friends.

She would much have preferred taking her walk alone; but after all Maddox proved himself a very agreeable companion, although he looked at her rather oftener than there was any strict necessity for, and contrived to throw an amount of admiration in his gaze that the young girl found slightly embarrassing.

"How do you like the Grange?" he queried presently, after he had asked her when she arrived, and various other questions, all of which she had answered as briefly as possible. "I am afraid you will find it horribly dull."

"I have not been used to much gaiety."

"No; but you have a right to expect it all the same."

"It's a right I am not inclined to enforce."

"That's because you don't know your own power. Nature intended you for a Queen, whose reign should be absolute pleasure, and whose word should be law."

Vera laughed in spite of herself at this high-flown compliment.

By this time they had reached the lodge gates, and she was looking shyly at the old thorn which was to bear Maurice St. John's signal.

"We will turn back," she said, coming to a pause, and casting a wistful glance up the lane to the spot where Maurice had bidden her goodbye. "Is there not another way of reaching the Grange beside the avenue?"

Maddox hesitated before he answered.

"Yes, through the plantation. Would you like to return by it? We have plenty of time. It is not yet six o'clock, and none of the household will be stirring for another two hours."

"You know your way well about the grounds," she observed, as they bent their steps towards the plantation.

The colour came in his cheek, and he bit his lip.

"Oh, yes, fairly well. You see I have stayed here rather often for the shooting. Adela is the only relation I have in England, and she has been very kind to me—so has her husband, too."

By going through the plantation, they were screened from the sight of anyone at the house, nevertheless the walk was not so pleasant as it might have been if the ground had been drier.

Rain had fallen the day before, and the thick interlacing boughs of the trees had prevented the sun from reaching the path, which was in consequence too moist to be altogether good walking.

At one part of the road Nero, the bloodhound, who had been soberly trotting on in front, suddenly darted aside, and made his way to an old decayed tree trunk, which looked as if it had been struck by lightning, and had half of its bark peeled off.

Arrived here the animal stood still, and looked back at Dudley with an expression of almost human intelligence in its eyes, while he gave vent to a low deep bark.

Vera was surprised at the frown that came on her companion's brow. It vanished immediately, but not before she had time to see the extraordinary change it effected in his handsome, smooth face, which for the moment was absolutely transformed.

"Come back Nero—Nero!" he shouted, but the dog only wagged his tail, and Dudley therefore plunged in the brushwood after him, and returned dragging him by the collar.

"I have discovered a strange thing," said Vera, who had been looking on the ground rather attentively. "I find someone has been here

within the last few hours, whose footmarks correspond exactly with yours."

"What do you mean?"

For answer she pointed to the path in front of her, and there clearly enough were the imprints of boots—a double track, as if someone had come from the Grange, turned aside just where the dog had darted off, and then come back, and retraced his steps.

The track crossed occasionally, but it was nevertheless perfectly distinct, and the marks, as Vera said, corresponded exactly with Maddox's boots.

"Perhaps you were in the plantation this morning before you came to the Grange," said Vera, "only," she added, "that would not explain the double track."

"I haven't been here at all for days," he rejoined rather shortly. "It must have been someone prowling about in search of rabbits—a poacher most likely."

Vera thought that poachers' boots would probably be much larger, and have hobnails in them, but this opinion she kept to herself.

She was beginning to learn the wisdom of golden silence.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TWO DECLARATIONS.

A week had passed away, and Vera had not seen Maurice. Every day on some pretext or other she managed to go down to the old thorn, but always with the same result, and her heart grew more with a longing that she hardly dared put in words, even to her own consciousness.

Meanwhile Dudley Maddox still remained at the Grange, and she saw a good deal of him. Certainly his coming made the house much brighter, although even his presence could not altogether lift the cloud that seemed to hang over the gloomy old place.

He was always ready to accompany the young girl on her walks, sing duets with her to the old guitar that he had hunted up, and make himself generally agreeable.

Mrs. Graham did not encourage the intimacy; indeed Vera thought that she did all in her power to prevent the two young people being thrown together; but her efforts were not crowned with success. Dudley had a way of quietly carrying his point in spite of any amount of opposition.

He was clever and well read; but there was a certain secretiveness about him which not even Vera could overcome. He seldom spoke of himself, never of his past life, and neither he nor madame had offered any explanation of his sudden appearance at the Grange, or alluded to his possession of the latch-key.

Vera saw her father every day; but the interviews were not altogether satisfactory. Try as she would the girl could not disguise from herself the fact that her father had bitterly disappointed her.

True, their meetings generally took place in the presence of madame, which made any display of affection impossible. Once or twice when they chanced to be alone the old man had surprised his daughter by suddenly straining her to his breast, and whispering to her brokenly how much he cared for her; but Vera shrank from such outbursts, their restrained vehemence frightened her.

Once, too, she had been witness to a scene between husband and wife that was not intended for her eyes. She had left the study, and then had gone back to ask her father if she might get a book out of his well-stored shelves. She paused on the threshold, for madame was kneeling beside Mr. Graham's chair, her arms round his neck, and her face upraised to his.

"Tell me you care for me still, tell me I am first with you!" she cried out in a passionate imploring voice. "Sometimes I have a horrible fear that that girl has come between us, and if that were so what good would my life be to me? Yes, I am jealous, I acknowledge, what woman who loves as I love you is not? I would kill her if I thought she had robbed me of your affection."

Vera quietly withdrew, and postponed asking for her book.



That same evening she slipped out of the house, as she thought unperceived, and instead of going down the avenue she took the path through the plantation, thinking she would run less risk of being seen; and thus escape Dudley Maddox's company. But she had reckoned without her host, for before she had got more than half way he came up with her from behind.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going out!" he asked, reproachfully. "It was only by the merest chance that I saw you."

"Perhaps I didn't wish you to see me at all," she rejoined, half archly, half defiantly.

"In that case you are very cruel."

"Am I? I don't quite see where the cruelty comes in."

"But women are cruel when they know they have unlimited power," he added, inconsequently, not heeding her remark, and switching the bushes moodily with a cane he held in his hand. "They are all the same, every one."

"Your experience has been an unfortunate one."

"It has been much the same as that of other men, I expect, only that I have not frittered away my heart in half-a-dozen silly flirtations, as is the case with so many fellows nowadays."

"And on that account you claim for yourself special virtue!" Vera said, rather satirically.

"I don't do anything of the sort. What I do claim for myself is the power of loving with a passionate devotion that I fancy is rare in this nineteenth century of ours."

He looked straight at her as he spoke, and Vera's eyes fell under the ardour of his gaze. She moved a little to one side so as to increase the distance between them, and in so doing her drapery was caught by a bramble, which held her fast.

In a moment Dudley was on his knees at her feet striving to disengage the soft white folds. The task was apparently not an easy one, for he lingered over it much longer than there seemed to be any necessity for, and when the dress was finally released he stood in front of the young girl so as to prevent her going forward.

"Wait a minute," he said, and his breath came rather faster than usual. "I want to have a good look at you so as to get a mental portrait of how you appear this evening. You have never been so beautiful—surely no woman ever was so beautiful!"

The words seemed forced from him by a power stronger than himself, and, indeed, he had a fair excuse for them, for Vera looked supremely lovely.

She wore a white cloth dress, in which every apple curve, every rounded contour of her figure was displayed to fullest perfection.

A sash of soft full amber silk was twisted round her waist, and a tiny ribbon of the same colour filleted through the great burnished knot of her hair, which shone like red gold in the evening light.

Her cheeks were flushed—as much with annoyance as anything else—but the cause did not prevent the effect from being very perfect. Could anything be more lovely than that rich carmine blush, with the velvet darkness of her lashes lying upon it?

"Vera!" Maddox exclaimed, seizing both her hands in his, and speaking in a quick, strained whisper. "I have never been conquered by a woman before, but I yield myself a willing slave now. You have bewitched me, enthralled me, and my life is worthless if it cannot be shared with you. I have not known you long; but each moment passed in your presence has been like drinking deep of life's richest and reddest elixir. Darling, I love you! Good Heavens!" he cried, with a fierce movement of impatience, "how weak words are to express one's deepest feelings! A hundred men might say the same words to you, but they would be incapable of feeling one tithe of the passion that burns in my heart at the mere sense that you are near me! What a life I will give you, Vera, if you will only be mine! I will take you away from here, away from grey skies and chilly winds, to some southern land where it is always summer and the sun always shines. I will devote myself to you with an utter devotion that will think itself repaid a hundred fold by one kiss from your sweet lips.

Speak to me, my beautiful princess, give me hope, tell me that you will let me teach you love's sweet lessons!"

The words poured from his lips in an eloquent stream that left him no time to heed the look of distress which had come in her eyes. His overwhelming passion blinded him to everything. He could not see that she shrank back from his fiery wooing, almost frightened by his vehemence.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, incoherently, and yet touched by his evident sincerity. "It cannot be—it can never be!"

"Don't say that, Vera! I will be very patient; I will wait for you as long as Jacob waited for Rachel if you bid me do so; but I can't give you up! No, if you refuse me a hundred times I won't take your answer as final."

At this moment there came the deep-mouthed bay of Nero from close at hand, and a second later Madame appeared round a curve in the path.

An instantaneous change came over Dudley. He loosed the girl's hands and drew farther back, muttering at the same time an imprecation below his breath.

Mrs. Graham, although she was in sight, was still out of earshot; nevertheless Maddox lowered his voice to a whisper, as he said, swiftly,—

"You will not betray what I have said to you—you will make no mention of it to Adela!"

"I shall make no mention of it to anyone," she returned with the gentle dignity that sat so well upon her.

For a moment Dudley looked gloomily on the ground, then, rousing himself with an effort, he added,—

"I will go and meet Adela. Perhaps under the circumstances you would rather continue your walk alone."

She was grateful to him for the suggestion, which met with her full approval. She was still a little agitated, and glad to have an opportunity of getting back her usual calm. Dudley Maddox was a man with a very strong personality, and a certain dominating power of will that made itself felt by all with whom he came in contact, and Vera could not dismiss his declaration from her mind as merely an ordinary everyday episode. There was something fascinating about the man too, and she acknowledged this to herself even while she was conscious of a sense of mistrust that had haunted her ever since their first meeting. The idea that the Grange held some secret still possessed her, and in her own mind she connected Maddox with it.

When she reached the end of the plantation she turned round to find out if the other two were in sight, but as she could not see them she concluded they must have gone back home. She gave a little sigh of relief, and her footsteps grew swifter and lighter, while she hurried through the rusty old lodge gates into the lane. The message she had been expecting was there—a dove's feather lay on the lowest branch of the thorn tree.

"He must have been here yesterday," the young girl murmured disappointedly, "and perhaps he won't come again this evening."

But hardly had the words passed her lips before Maurice himself appeared in the distance.

How his face lighted up as he saw her, and how the red blood flashed up, warm and bright, to her cheeks! For a little while they stood hand clasped in hand, saying nothing, but feeling as if the golden gates had opened and they had entered Paradise. At last Vera gently drew her hands away.

"You were here last night!" she said, questioningly.

"Yes; and left you my message. Did you see it in the thorn tree? I only returned from London yesterday afternoon, so you see I lost no time in seeking you. I am putting up with my uncle, Lord Evermonde, and I had a little difficulty in evading his questions as to where I was going," Maurice added, smiling.

"Have you discovered anything concerning the jewels?"

"Not very much; nevertheless, I feel I am on the track of discovery. I went to the captain of the ship which brought the jewels over, and frankly told him my object. He at once promised

to give me every assistance in his power, and I obtained a list of the passengers who had come over with him. He says that he told no one of the value of the diamonds, and yet he was aware that a whisper of it had somehow got abroad. The crew he believed to be above suspicion. I got the help of detectives, and they traced all the passengers, with a satisfactory result in every case save one. An old man who had come aboard at Marseilles was found to have given a false address, and presumably a false name also—that of Cardew. After landing at Southampton all trace of him was lost, and although the detectives made every effort they were unable to find out what had become of him. His description is that of a tall man of about sixty, with very long white hair and beard—altogether a striking looking person, and one who would be likely to attract attention. My own impression is that he is identical with my poor brother's murderer. Of course it is premature to say so, and the detectives won't commit themselves to an opinion, but they are now making every possible inquiry, and I am hoping to hear in a day or two that they have been successful. More than that, I shall have a portrait of Cardew, and that will be a tremendous aid."

"How shall you obtain it?"

"Through one of the passengers who had a detective camera with him, and who was always surprising people by taking their likenesses without their knowledge. The captain told me of this young man, and said that he believed he had contrived to photograph every person on board, or nearly every one. So I went to him on the chance that he might have Cardew in his gallery, and I found this was the case. But he had not yet developed the negative, so I did not see it. He promised to print one or two proofs this week and forward them to me. On the whole my visit to the captain has borne fruit; it was you who first suggested it, you know!"

Vera smiled, but did not say anything. Her fair face wore a very thoughtful look.

"I have not told you all," continued Maurice. "This morning I went with one of the engineers of the line through the Greystoke tunnel, and in the wall we found a few bricks that had evidently been loosened. We took them out and discovered a hollow at the back, quite large enough for the murderer to have hidden his feminine disguise after he left the train."

"But the clothes were not there?"

"No, I hardly expected to find them. They were doubtless only placed there temporarily, and were abstracted later on—in the night, most likely, and probably by a confederate. This confirms my former idea that we shall find the guilty person somewhere in the neighbourhood of Greystoke."

"There is another point that I have not yet mentioned, and which increases our suspicion against Cardew. It seems a daring robbery of bonds took place at Marseilles just before he left the place, and the police fancy he was concerned in it. They tell me there have been lately several robberies of the same description both in England and abroad, and yet there is no clue to the perpetrators of them; but it is known a gang of thieves exists with an extremely daring and clever captain at their head—may be this very man. I will show you his photograph directly I get it."

They were walking quietly up the lane, which was lighted by the last level gleams of sunset. A blackbird flew low across their path with a sharp startled cry, the air was full of the fresh wet fragrance of leaf and blossom, and except for the songs of the birds complete stillness reigned.

Suddenly Vera stumbled over a stone, uttering a little exclamation of pain as her foot struck against it. She would have fallen forward had not Maurice caught her in his arms in time.

"I am not hurt," she said, hurriedly, trying to extricate herself, but vainly, for he would not let her go.

Was there some sorcery about the girl tonight? Had her loveliness gained a new and subtle power which took captive men's senses and held them in a bondage from which they did not even desire to escape? It would seem so.

Dudley Maddox had fallen under the spell and

now Maurice felt its potency. Nothing had been farther from his intention when he met her that evening than a declaration of love, and yet when his arms touched her, when for one short moment she lay on his breast, her heart throbbing against his, her beautiful lips so near his own, a sudden madness came over him, and he could not keep back the torrent of words that pressed for utterance.

Almost before he knew what he was doing he told her how the thought of her filled his life, and this time Vera did not draw back. In good truth her pulses were leaping as wildly as his own, the blood was coursing through her veins with as swift vitality. His passionate utterances unfolded to her the meaning of the secret she had not dared to whisper to her own heart—he loved him!

#### CHAPTER IX. AN INVITATION.

LIFE presented a different aspect to Veronica Graham after that magic evening.

There was a new light in her eyes, a more beautiful bloom on her cheeks, an added radiance in her expression.

It seemed to her that she had not known what happiness really was until Maurice St. John's kisses transformed the budding love in her heart into the perfect flower.

The only cloud on her horizon was the necessity for secrecy.

Maurice thought it would be a sort of disrespect to his brother's memory if his engagement were announced so soon after poor Frank's death, so he decided to wait for three months before he asked Mr. Graham's consent to his daughter's betrothal.

Meanwhile the lovers met every evening either in the lane, or the plantation, and the golden hours flew by as if no dark shadows lurked in the background ready to blot out the sunshine.

Nevertheless, matters at the Grange were by no means satisfactory, and if Vera had not been so wrapped up in her love dream, she would have recognised this.

Her interviews with her father became fewer, and Madame's manner grew shorter and sharper.

Often Vera found her step-mother's eyes fixed on her face instinct with a brooding hate that for the moment made her shiver.

A smouldering fire of revengeful venom dwelt there which must inevitably break into a blaze sooner or later.

Dudley Maddox still remained an inmate of the house, but he never alluded to those wild words of love into which he had been hurried.

She seldom met him alone—Mrs. Graham seemed to take great pains to guard against such a possibility.

Most of Vera's time was spent out of doors. She grew to hate the very atmosphere of the sunless old Grange, with its encircling trees and stagnant water.

Nero had become reconciled to her presence by this time, and she often took him with her on her long solitary excursions.

Mrs. Graham had at first objected to this, but a few words from Dudley soon silenced her objections.

Vera sometimes wondered at his influence over the woman. However, as it was generally exercised in her favour, she had no occasion to regret it.

She was returning one morning from a long ramble, and had reached the plantation, when Nero broke into a furious barking, and bounded away through the undergrowth, making the wood echo with his deep-mouthed bay.

Vera called him back, but her calls were unheeded, and she hurried after him rather fearing a catastrophe—for the dog was as savage as a lion, and would have shown small mercy to a stranger who happened to cross his path.

The scene that met the young girl's gaze would have been comic if it had not also inspired her with terror for after consequences.

There stood Nero at the foot of a tree exhibiting his fangs in a truly ferocious manner, while half way up the trunk, clinging to the branches for dear life and showing a face absolutely

blanched with fear, was a man in a smock frock. His eyes were almost starting out of his head, and the moment they fell on Vera, he screamed out,—

"Take that beast away—call him off—shoot him—do something with him! He'll tear me to pieces if he gets the chance, and the branch I'm holding on to is very slight—it might crack at any minute. For the dear Lord's sake, young lady, get him away."

Vera put her hand on his collar and tried to soothe the angry animal. Her efforts, however, were only partially successful.

Nero consented to leave off barking, but he lay down in an attitude of attention, keeping his red eyes fixed watchfully on his wretched victim, and ready to pounce at a moment's notice if the unfortunate man gave the least symptom of descending.

"Oh Lord, oh Lord, what will become of me!" muttered the prisoner, desperately. "He'll devour me to a dead certainty. I can see it in his eyes."

"I will take him away directly," said Vera, still keeping her hand on his collar; "but you must tell me first what business you have here. These are private grounds, and you are trespassing."

"I was a'coming up to the house, thinking p'raps I might be took on as a labourer," returned the man, his self-possession apparently returning. "I heard as how a odd man was wanted up there. Maybe you know if it's true?"

"I know, it is not true," the young girl responded, looking at him rather closely, for his sudden change of tone had arrested her attention, "and I would advise you to go back immediately, and not to venture in the neighbourhood again."

"You just let me find myself safe outside them there gates, and the wealth of the Ingies wouldn't make me trust my precious carkis in that brute's reach agen!" exclaimed the man, vivaciously. "I've too much respect for my bones, Miss."

Vera had some difficulty in persuading Nero of the wisdom of retiring. The animal cast sundry and regretful glances at the dangling legs of his enemy, and continued his growling long after she had dragged him away. But when he reached the Grange his attention was distracted by the very unusual sight of a carriage, drawn by a pair of ponies, and driven by a delicately fair, vivacious looking lady, attired in slight mourning, who uttered a little cry of delight as her eyes fell on Vera.

"You are Miss Graham, are you not?" she exclaimed, throwing the reins to the groom, and jumping down from her seat to advance towards the young girl. "I must introduce myself as Lady Evremond, Maurice St. John's aunt by marriage. I came over to make your acquaintance, and see if I could not persuade you to drive back with me to the Court, or if not, to promise to come to-morrow and stay with me for a few days. I am glad you happened to appear just at this moment, for to tell you the truth the Grange looked so dismal and like an ogre's castle that I was really half frightened into going back with my mission unfulfilled!" She laughed as she said this, a pretty musical laugh, that Vera compared to a ripple of silver bells.

"But won't you come in, now!" she returned, "and then you will be able to judge for yourself that the ogre does not live here."

"I think not this morning, my dear, as I have had the good fortune to meet you. Is there any reason why you should not drive back with me at once?"

Vera looked doubtful; the idea was very fascinating, and she was immensely attracted by Lady Evremond; but it was necessary to obtain permission from the authorities within before she ventured to accept the invitation. Perhaps her little ladyship guessed what was passing in her mind, for she added,—

"Run in and hear what your father says. I will wait here meanwhile, and study natural history in the shape of the frogs that have coloured the moat."

Vera at once adopted the suggestion, and ran round to the study, where she hoped to find her father alone.

But in this she was disappointed, for Madame was seated on a hassock at the old man's feet, busy mending a hole in his dressing-gown.

In a few words Vera gave her message, which was the occasion of an exchange of significant glances between husband and wife.

For a minute neither spoke; then Madame said angrily,—

"Why did not Lady Evremond come in? It is all nonsense to say the dismal exterior of the house frightened her; but the fact is she wanted to be polite to you and rude to me. Oh, yes, I understand it all perfectly. Here have I been living here for months, and her high and mighty ladyship has never thought it worth her while to call on me, while directly you come home she and Lord Evremond go out of their way to make themselves agreeable. But I won't have it. You shall not go to the Court—do you hear, Vera? I forbid it."

An expression of unmistakable disappointment swept over poor Vera's face, and she looked imploringly at her father.

He nodded wearily in his chair, then addressed his wife half deprecatingly.

"Don't you think, Adela, we might let the child go—not to-day, but to-morrow? Under the circumstances, I am of opinion it might be advisable—what do you say?"

His tone was full of significance, and seemed to impress her against her will.

She let her eyes fall sullenly.

"Very well. You are her father, and ought to know best. If you wish her to go, I won't continue my objections."

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" Vera cried, radiant, and she flew back to Lady Evremond.

"I am sorry I can't carry you off to-day," said her ladyship, taking her seat in the carriage again, "but it is something to have secured you for to-morrow. I will send over about this time in the morning, and I shan't let you go under a week. That is understood. By the way, how is your father?"

"Not very well, I am afraid."

"I am sorry for that. He used to be a great friend of my husband's in his younger days, and I think I have seen him once or twice too. He struck me as being very pleasant and genial—it is a pity he shuts himself up so now. However, I have no doubt he knows his own feelings best, and perhaps he prefers books to society. For my part, I like human documents best. Well, au revoir, my dear Miss Graham—till to-morrow."

She waved her hand blithely as she drove away, and Vera stood watching her until a turn in the avenue hid her and her ponies from view.

The sight of her merely seemed to do the girl good—she was not so very young, but she was so bright, so refined, so gay, and brought with her a whiff of the world of fashion that was simply fascinating to one whose life was as quiet and gloomy as Vera's.

After she had gone the girl walked slowly round towards the study, and then she noticed, for the first time, that it was built in a sort of tower that stood out from the rest of the house, and contained a couple of rooms above.

She supposed they were unoccupied, for the windows were blocked up with inside shutters, and the ivy that overgrew the tower had made a perfect network across the glass.

Although outside the sun was shining brilliantly this part of the building was in shadow, for not only did it front the east, but the sweeping boughs of the huge cedar kept out air and sunlight.

"Oh, papa!" Vera cried, struck with a sudden pity as she saw the cowered up figure in the big arm-chair, "do leave this wretched room and come into the sunshine with me. Do you know you have never once been outside the house since I came home?"

He smiled as he raised his head, and then sighed.

"Sunlight is for the young, my child, not for the old. It makes my head ache. However, if you want to have a companion Dudley will go with you for a walk. He is in the library with your step-mother. They have just left me."

"But I don't want Dudley—I want you."

"That is very good of you, Vera. Well, come



and sit on this hassock, and we will have a little chat. By the way, I hope you and Dudley get on well together. He is a good-hearted young fellow, and has showed great kindness to me in many ways."

Vera made no reply; but she moved restlessly as her father laid his hand on her head. She would have drawn away, but that she feared displeasing him.

"And so you are anxious to get away to Evermond Court?" he went on presently. "Well, it will be a pleasant little change for you. It will be a glimpse of the world. By the way, what about your dresses?"

"Oh, I shall manage all right. Lady Evermond won't expect to see me a great swell."

"I suppose you have no jewellery of any kind?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"None; except what I am wearing at the present moment."

"Which is worth about thirty shillings all told. Well, we must see what we can do for you," saying which he rose from his chair, and hobbled painfully to an old bureau that stood in one corner of the room, which he unfashioned with a key that hung round his neck.

From some innermost recess he drew forth a brown paper parcel, and this he opened, displaying to view a necklace of white stones that threw out iridescent gleams as the light fell upon it.

"There! you can have that. It is a pretty thing, and it belonged to your mother. Don't let Madame see it, or even suspect I have given it to you. She might think she had a claim to it, instead of which it should be yours."

"How lovely!" enthusiastically breathed Vera, to whom jewellery was as pleasing as it is to most young girls; "but is it not very valuable?"

"It would be if the stones were real diamonds; but they are not."

"What are they—paste?" asked Vera, and it must be admitted there was disappointment in her tone.

"No; they are crystals of a peculiar and uncommon kind. They have a certain value of their own; but what I meant to say was you mustn't run away with the idea that they are pure brilliants. However, they'll look just as well when they shine on your white neck. Now, what are you going to give me for them?" he added, playfully.

"What can I give you?"

"A kiss. That will content me;" but one did not content him, for he kissed her over and over again, and when she finally took the jewels away with her it was with his repeated injunctions that she should not show them to her step-mother.

The rest of the afternoon she spent furishing up her somewhat scanty wardrobe, so as to make it presentable for appearing at Evermond Court, where she would meet her lover, and where it therefore behooved her to look her best. Of course she knew that the invitation was due to Maurice's influence, otherwise Lady Evermond would certainly not have gone out of her way to visit the Grange.

Just as it became dusk, but before the lamps were lighted, she bethought herself of the two rooms in the east wing which she had noticed in the morning; and a sudden freak to explore the old Grange—which she had not hitherto done—and see what these rooms were used for, made her put by her work and go into the corridor.

In order to reach the east wing she had to traverse innumerable passages, and at the end of the last one she was confronted by a green baize door, which was shut, but from the lock of which a couple of keys hung down on a chain. She pushed this, and it yielded, to give access to a dark oak panelled corridor, at the end of which was a stained-glass window—but so shaded by the flattened cedar branches and fretted over with cobwebs that the light had much ado to come in at all.

As Vera entered, the baize door swung to with a curiously hollow, metallic sound, that, for the moment startled her, and half inclined her to go back. And, indeed, there was something in the very atmosphere of the place suggestive of eerie and ghostly ideas—the silence, the chill, the damp

smells of mould, the hanging festoons of cobwebs—all conspired to produce this effect.

But Vera was no coward; and after a moment's hesitation she proceeded boldly to the end of the passage in order to look through the window. And then a curious thing happened. Through the blurred and misty panes a face looked in at her—its outlines dim and uncertain, but the eyes glowing like those of some wild beast as they met hers—while she stood white and terrified, and conscious of some horrible fascination that kept her rooted to the spot, and would not allow her to move—a veritable nightmare. Then she closed her eyes in desperation. When she opened them again the face was gone, but simultaneously a hand shot out of the darkness of the faded hangings on the wall, and grasped her arm.

"Good gracious, Deborah, is that you!" she exclaimed, turning sharply round, and recognising the coarse face and moustached lips of the old housekeeper. "How you startled me."

"It's well it was nothing worse than me that startled you," rejoined Deborah, sullenly. "What brings you here, I'd like to know!"

"I was only going on a voyage of discovery through the house. Surely there's no harm in that."

"Harm or not, I'd advise you not to do it again. Praps you might see sights you didn't want to if you come pokin' and pryin' about these passages."

"What do you mean? Surely you don't believe in ghosts?"

"Never you mind what I believe in. I've seen what I've seen, and I know what I know—that is, the less you go trespassing about this part of the house the better. Come, move on. I want to look up again."

She put her hand on Vera's shoulders, and seemed as if she would push her towards the door. The young girl's face flushed at the contact, but it would have been too undignified to attempt resistance—especially as this masculine looking old woman seemed to be as strong as the proverbial horse—and so she shook off the touch, and walked out of the corridor, Deborah following and carefully locking the door behind her.

"Look here, missie," she said, catching Vera up, and speaking in a lower and different tone. "I've no wish to offend you—you're young, and all young people are foolish, so I'll just give you one bit of advice. It isn't always eyes are made to see with, and ears to hear with—sometimes they're only useful for telling you what you mustn't see, and mustn't hear. Do you understand?"

Vera shook her head helplessly. She saw the old woman did not mean to be impertinent, but before she could ask her what she meant they were met by Madame, who was coming upstairs, looking thoroughly disturbed.

"Such a terrible thing has happened!" she exclaimed. "We have just found Nero outside, poisoned."

(To be continued.)

OBSERVATIONS from a captive balloon are more easily carried out at sea than on land, because the air currents are more uniform and are not so subject to sudden changes. Vessels can be distinguished perfectly, and there is no difficulty in recognising whether they are merchantmen or men-of-war. Some recent experiments with these balloons result in the conclusion that at a height of one thousand three hundred feet it is not possible to see the bottom of the sea to any great depth, in consequence of the impediments to vision offered by the colour of the water and of the bottom. With a favourable light rocks and sand banks are clearly defined at depths of from nineteen to twenty-three feet. Larger sand banks can be seen according to the colour of the water at a depth of forty feet. In naval warfare captive balloons would be of great utility as observatories to a fleet, enabling the officers to reconnoitre the entrance of unknown harbours, and for ascertaining the exact position of forts, batteries and other defences. In time of peace the balloons could be used in hydrographical searches.

## BRENDA'S GUARDIAN.

—101—

### CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. LENNOX would have been amused could she have known Lady Mary's fears respecting her. It was perfectly true that she had telegraphed three times to Sir Guy, but the first two messages were in obedience to his earnest request that if she needed any help he could give she would send for him; whilst the last—the one Lady Mary had told Brenda about—was really sent not on her own behalf but another's.

Sir Guy reached Kennington late in the afternoon. He found Mrs. Lennox alone in her little front parlour looking more depressed and troubled even than usual; but her expression changed to one of relief as she greeted him.

"It was good of you to come. Mrs. Fulton is in such trouble. She was here this morning in such distress I promised to send for you. I could think of no one else."

"Mrs. Fulton!" exclaimed Guy Cameron, "I never heard of her in my life."

"She is Sir Marmaduke Tremaine's housekeeper; perhaps you have heard of her as 'Martha'."

"Martha! of course I have, she is a kind of combined housekeeper, family servant, and despot. Do you know I meant to call in at Dolphin-street after seeing you, if I could make time. We are getting seriously alarmed about Sir Marmaduke."

"So is Mrs. Fulton," explained Susan Lennox; "it will be a month to-morrow since he left Dolphin-street. He told her he might be gone a couple of nights, and from that day to this she has heard nothing from him."

"Why in the world didn't she send to me?"

"I don't think, poor woman, she knew what to do. Her master hates being talked about; and, perhaps, she was afraid of offending him. She telegraphed to his country house, and found he had not been there, and they were not expecting him."

"What made her come to you?"

"Finding my name and address on a sheet of paper in Sir Marmaduke's study. She left the paper with me. It seems to be a sort of plan for the week following his leaving Dolphin-street. She hoped, poor woman, by coming to me to discover if her master had been here."

The "plan" was only a few pencil lines jotted hastily on a piece of paper. Sir Guy ran his eye rapidly over it.

Monday, May 23rd.—Cameron Castle.

Tuesday, May 24th.—P. M.

Wednesday, May 25th.—P. M.

Thursday, 26.—Call on Mrs. Lennox, 9, Turner-street, Kennington.

Friday, May 27th.—See G. and B.

Saturday, May 28th.—Back to C. C.

"He did come to us on the 23rd of May. I remember the date perfectly, but he left very early the next morning."

"Yes," said Mrs. Lennox, "he went back to Dolphin-street for about an hour. He was employed chiefly in writing letters. There is no doubt it was then he made this 'plan,' probably he meant to put it in his pocket, and forgot it."

"And do you mean to say that woman has actually done nothing for a month?" cried Sir Guy indignantly; "she ought to be prosecuted."

"She did her duty according to her lights," said Mrs. Lennox; "she seems to have had a great fear of annoying her master by making any commotion. Then I gather that Sir Marmaduke is by no means a punctual man; so, perhaps, at first the delay in his return did not alarm her. When her fears were once aroused, she did her utmost, telegraphing both to his country house and to his nephew at school; she also inquired at his club. The moment she found the paper I have shown you she came here. I could only tell her that I had not seen Sir Marmaduke on the date named, and suggested telegraphing for you. She is by no means a stupid woman; for instance, she made out that the entry for the 28th, 'Back to C. C.' meant an intention to return to

Cameron Castle, which I own never struck me. She also guessed that G. and B. stood for a firm of upholsterers who are refurbishing some rooms at Tremaine Grange. She had been to them before I saw her, and ascertained that though they had not seen Sir Marmaduke on the day named they had been expecting him to call for a month past, being, in fact, at an utter standstill with his commission until they received more definite instructions."

Guy Cameron looked at Mrs. Lennox.

"What on earth does it mean?"

She shook her head.

"I can form no idea. I suggested an accident.

Even the strongest men are liable to mischances, such as being knocked down and run over, but Mrs. Fulton declared that when her master left Dolphin-street he had his card case in his pocket, and also took with him a small travelling bag which had his name engraved on it."

Guy looked troubled.

"I don't like it," he said gravely. "Granted that Tremaine is not exact in business matters, he is the last man in the world to cause anyone needless anxiety. I know he was particularly attached to 'Martha,' as he always called her, and I can't believe he would put her to all this worry and uneasiness if he could help it."

Mrs. Lennox pointed to the letters "P M" on the plan.

"To my mind that is the solution to the mystery; whatever 'P M' represented was to occupy him two days; when we can solve the enigma we shall know whether he kept that appointment and under what circumstances he was last seen alive."

Sir Guy looked almost as troubled as the simple-minded widow.

"Sir Marmaduke had not an enemy in the world," he said slowly. "Can you form any idea as to the nature of his business with you?"

"I should have thought under all the circumstances he would have avoided me steadily," she answered.

"He was not to blame in that sad business of long ago," replied Sir Guy; "but I think I can guess why he wished to see you. Brenda tells me that his half-brother died under her father's roof last January. He would naturally want to hear the details of his death."

Mrs. Lennox's mild eyes filled with tears.

"Of course I had heard Jack Tremaine was wild, what you call a black sheep, but, Sir Guy, no one could see him without loving him; he had the most winning face, the most fascinating manner of any man I ever saw."

"I never met him," replied Guy Cameron, "but I know he was the disgrace of the family; he actually suffered imprisonment in the colony for diamond stealing."

Mrs. Lennox shook her head.

"Don't let us talk about him, we should never agree, and, indeed, Sir Marmaduke's fate is a far more pressing question."

"It is," agreed Sir Guy. "I propose to go round to Dolphin-street and see Mrs. Fulton, she may be able to tell me her master's lawyer; it need be Carlyle, of the Inner Temple. I think the affair is too serious to be trifled with by amateur handling."

Mrs. Lennox turned deadly white.

"You can't mean you think there has been foul play?"

"I don't know what to think," said Sir Guy in troubled tones; "but I can't believe a man of Sir Marmaduke's steady habits and upright character would disappear like this of his own free will. The lawyer may be able to tell me if he had crossed anyone's ill will. His brother was mixed up with a very shady lot; still as Jack is dead, they could have no object in harming Tremaine."

"And you will let me know when you have any news?"

"Certainly. Do you know, Mrs. Lennox, you have never once asked after my ward."

"Dear Brenda," and a note of tenderness came into the widow's voice, "you cannot think how I have missed her. I hope," rather anxiously, "your mother likes her, and does not condemn her for the past?"

"My mother is delighted with her; she gets

on much better with Brenda than I do. The truth is, Susan, my ward detests me."

"Surely you are mistaken."

"I think not. Well, my guardianship is not likely to last very long, already there are people anxious to relieve me of it," and he told her of Fred Ainslie's proposal.

"I wish she had accepted him," said Mrs. Lennox. "Oh, yes, I know you and Lady Mary will take all possible care of the child, but I shall never feel really easy about Brenda till she is safe in a husband's care."

"Then I fear that your anxiety will last some time, for she assured me to-day she never intended to marry at all."

He took a cab to Dolphin-street, Piccadilly being a far cry from Kennington.

He found Mrs. Fulton had fretted herself almost into a fever with grief and suspense.

"You see, sir," she said simply, "if I'd only something to do the waiting wouldn't seem so hard, but just to sit here with folded hands while my master may be in danger is almost enough to drive me mad."

"But he may not be in any danger, Martha," insisted Sir Guy.

"He's never stayed away like this of his own free will," replied the woman. "Why, two weeks back was Whitsuntide, and they give four days holiday at Master Don's school. Sir Marmaduke had planned he'd have the little boy up here and take him a round of sight-seeing. I've written myself to Master Don, and he says he's not heard from his uncle for over a month. He spent Whitsuntide at school. Now, Sir Guy, that child is the very light of the master's eyes. He well-nigh counts the days to his holidays. You'll not make me believe he disappointed the boy of his treat and never sent a word to explain it willingly."

Sir Guy did not believe it himself. Every word which came from the old servant made things look darker to him for his friend's fate.

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Carlyle is still your master's lawyer?"

"Yes, sir. The master hates business, and he's left things more and more to Mr. Carlyle of late years. He's made him Master Don's guardian, for of course, you know, sir, he couldn't trust Mr. John to look after the child."

"I'll go and see Mr. Carlyle as soon as his office opens to-morrow," Guy promised; "and now, Mrs. Fulton, do you think you can take me in for the night, or shall I go to an hotel?"

She was delighted at the proposal, as he knew she would be. It gave her both occupation and the delight of being useful. Guy Cameron had often spent a night in Dolphin-street with his friend, and Mrs. Fulton thought having him there was the next best thing to her master's return.

She would have preferred his opening the heap of letters and papers which had accumulated for Sir Marmaduke, but this Guy refused to do.

"If there is anything wrong, Mrs. Fulton, Mr. Carlyle will be the proper person to open those letters. I hope to see him by ten o'clock to-morrow, and then I shall know better what to be about. It is just possible, you know, that he is in Sir Marmaduke's confidence."

The clocks in the neighbourhood of the Temple were striking ten when Guy Cameron reached Mr. Carlyle's office and inquired for him.

"He'll be here in ten minutes, sir," said the clerk; "have you an appointment?"

"No; but I think Mr. Carlyle will see me if you tell him I come on most urgent business connected with Sir Marmaduke Tremaine."

That name evidently carried weight in the office. Guy found himself conducted to a pleasant, well-furnished private room, where in a short time he was joined by the head of the firm.

The two men were slightly acquainted, and exchanged ordinary greetings; then the lawyer said anxiously—

"I hope Sir Marmaduke Tremaine has sent you here to tell me he has changed his instructions for I never heard of a madder scheme."

"I am here to ask you for news of my old friend. He left my house in Bankshire on the twenty-fourth of May; he went straight to his

chambers in Dolphin-street, and remained there about an hour and a half, from that time to this all clue to his movements is lost. His housekeeper expected him to return in a day or two. He had promised me another visit in a few days. George and Bertram, the famous furniture people, have been expecting a call from him respecting an order of his they have in hand, but not one word or line has come. He was last seen getting into a cab at Dolphin-street early in the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of May, and from that moment his fate is lost in mystery."

"Good Heavens!"

Sir Guy felt alarmed. He had expected the lawyer to make light of his fears, perhaps to laugh them to scorn. He had told himself he must be prepared for any amount of good-natured rillery. It came upon him now that he would rather have borne the most mocking ridicule than have seen the terrible impression his story made on Mr. Carlyle.

"You were his friend as well as his lawyer," said Sir Guy, "surely you can find some clue to his mysterious absence?"

"I should like to hear your own impression first," said the man of law cautiously.

"But I haven't got one. My first idea was that he had been run over and taken to a hospital; but Mrs. Fulton declares he had his card-case in his pocket, and was carrying a small travelling-bag, engraved with his name and address, so that my theory is impossible."

"Quite. And the housekeeper; she's an old family servant, and probably knows more of Sir Marmaduke than his closest friend."

"She! Well, you know Mr. Carlyle, that uneducated people always pile up the agony. She declares that *he's kept away*. That if he were free he would have come home or written."

"Ah!"

"But," said Guy, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "of course that is only the strong imagination of an ignorant woman. People aren't kidnapped nowadays, specially strong men in the prime of life."

Mr. Carlyle did not answer this question except by the Irish way of asking another.

"Weren't you surprised at my greeting? I told you I hoped Sir Marmaduke had sent you to tell me he had changed his mind for the scheme was madness."

"I had forgotten that in my own anxiety. What did you mean?"

Mr. Carlyle took an envelope from his table drawer, and handed it to Sir Guy.

"You are familiar with my client's writing. Should you say that was his hand?"

"Certainly, I could swear to it anywhere."

"Then please read the letter."

It was dated nearly a week previously, and the address given was of rather an obscure hotel in Paris.

The note was short and imperative, more the orders of a superior to his employé than the instructions a man would give to a lawyer who had been for many years his friend and adviser.

Sir Marmaduke requested Mr. Carlyle to tell out five thousand pounds from such of his securities and investments as were easiest to realise, and to remit the money at once to him in circular notes. The utmost despatch was urged.

"Well," said the lawyer, as Guy put down the letter in amazement, "what do you think of that?"

"I can't think at all; I am bewildered. What on earth is Tremaine doing in Paris; and what need can he have for five thousand pounds?"

"Just the questions I asked myself! Well, I wrote to Sir Marmaduke, and pointed out that it was a large amount to send after the fashion he directed, and that I should be in Paris myself in a fortnight, and would bring the money over with me."

"Have you had an answer?"

"Yes; a telegram, ordering me to fulfil his instructions, or he should place his affairs in the hands of another firm."

Guy Cameron looked straight into the lawyer's face, and then he brought down his fist on the table with a bang as he uttered the one word—

"forgery!"

"Since you have been here the same thought



has occurred to me. I own till then I thought it must be a passing fit of madness. But you said just now you would swear to the writing as your friend's."

"Yes; but I would swear also he never wrote such insolent overbearing letters."

"Just think things over quietly," said the lawyer. "This letter is not only in writing which is the fac-simile of our friend's; but it is sealed with his crest and coat of arms. I never recollect seeing Sir Marmaduke without that seal on his watch-chain."

"Noc!"

"So much in favour of the letter being genuine. Writing and seal are perfect facsimiles of Sir Marmaduke's; now for the contents. Our firm is known as Henry Carlyle and Son; but for twenty years I have been the only surviving partner. My name is Edward, and my clients—unless perfect strangers—always address letters to me, 'E. Carlyle, Esq.' My Paris correspondent, however, has the old name, 'Henry Carlyle.' Then I happen to know that Tremaine keeps a large balance at his bank. He is a man who hates the trouble of investments, and likes to keep a good sum to his credit in hard cash. He banks at the London Imperial, and I am positive that he could have drawn on them for the sum required or even double the amount."

"I don't like it," said Sir Guy; "it looks to me terrible. If this letter is a forgery Sir Marmaduke must be a prisoner in the hands of the man who forged it, for his seal could not be got at unless he were in his enemy's power."

"Well," said Carlyle, firmly, "I shall refuse to move in the matter of the five thousand pounds."

"You will refuse to realise it?"

"I shall maintain what the newspapers call a 'masterly silence,' that will puzzle my fine gentleman not a little. If only I could leave the office I would go over to Paris and discover who there was staying at the Hotel Tricolour in any way likely to be the transgressor."

"I can go!" said Guy Cameron, gravely. "I'll start by to-night's boat. But, Mr. Carlyle, hadn't we better go round to the bank, see the manager, and ascertain if he has been favoured with any communication from the forger? Failing to get the five thousand pounds from you the next attempt will be on the bank."

"Really, Sir Guy, you ought to be one of us!" was the flustering reply. "Your legal acumen does you credit. We'll go round at once; of course you'll accompany me!"

Sir Guy rose at once. His next words were full of a deep significance.

"If Sir Marmaduke is, indeed, in the power of a scoundrel, we must be careful. I would rather risk his losing all his savings than that any act of ours should bring pain or violence on himself."

"Yes, I am with you there; but, by cutting off the supplies, we strike the first blow for his freedom. The worst part of it is the heir-at-law is such a scoundrel he'd be rather grateful than otherwise to anyone who shortened my client's life."

"John Tremaine is dead," said Guy Cameron; "the heir is Donald, the little boy at school."

"And I am his sole guardian, so I have full power to act. Thank Heaven you told me! I have a free hand now. I suppose," he added, a little dubiously, "that you are sure of Jack Tremaine's decease? He was just the sort of fellow to have nine lives, and appear again when he was least wanted."

"I saw the lady yesterday at whose house he died," said Guy, gravely. "There seem to be two versions as to his character; in England he is spoken of as an inveterate black sheep, at the Colonial house, where his life ended, he seems to have been regarded as a victim, not sinning but sinned against."

"All women have a soft corner in their hearts for a prodigal," said the lawyer, "and specially a dying prodigal. Well, here we are at the bank, Sir Guy, and I only hope we shall find Hurst in!"

Which they did. The bank manager was a keen-eyed shrewd-looking man of business, with iron-grey hair, a decided manner, and ready wit.

He and Mr. Carlyle were fairly intimate, which perhaps facilitated matters.

"I have called on a very painful subject, Mr. Hurst," began the lawyer. "My client, Sir Marmaduke Tremaine, has not been heard of by his friends since the 24th of May; in the meantime I have received a letter and telegram, sent in his name, but which I believe to be forgeries. I have come to ask if you can throw any light on the matter. Has Sir Marmaduke been here lately? Has the man who imitates his signature so skilfully tried your credulity as well as mine?"

"Sir Marmaduke is in Paris," said the manager, shortly. "I heard from him this morning."

"The man impersonating him is in Paris, at the Hotel Tricolour," said Mr. Carlyle; "but both Sir Guy and myself are morally certain that Sir Marmaduke is in some position resembling imprisonment."

And he detailed carefully all that had already been discussed at his own office.

The manager's face grew very grave.

"I hope to goodness you are mistaken," he said, anxiously; then he rang his bell and told the clerk who answered it to bring him the book in which particulars of Sir Marmaduke's account were entered.

"I sent him the passbook to the Hotel Tricolour only yesterday," he said, gravely, "at his particular request."

"Naturally the scoundrel wanted to know the total amount of the balance. To overdraw the account might arouse suspicion."

Mr. Hurst did not answer, he was too busy turning over the ledger. He soon informed his visitor that twenty-five stamped cheques had been sent to Sir Marmaduke at the Burlington Hotel, Bournemouth, on the first of June, and that since that date his account had been very largely drawn on. The last cheque, one for three thousand pounds, was presented on the 15th of June; it was "open," and made payable to self or bearer.

"Just two days before my letter was written. The villain wanted money for his journey to Paris," said Mr. Carlyle.

The clerk who paid the cheque was called in to the consultation. He well remembered the occurrence. The cheque never aroused his suspicion in the least. He had seen Sir Marmaduke's signature scores of times, and saw nothing unusual in the writing. He did think three thousand pounds a large sum, knowing the baronet's cheques were usually for far smaller amounts. It was paid to a tall, dark man of middle age with a smooth face and yellow skin. He spoke with a trace of foreign accent, and the clerk put him down in his own mind as a foreign valet or courier.

"Do you mean he was a coloured man, or merely sunburnt?" demanded Mr. Hurst.

"He was not white."

"A nigger?"

"No," and the clerk was quite positive. "He was about the colour of a high caste Indian or Parsee. His hair was not woolly or curly, but perfectly straight. No," in answer to a question from Mr. Carlyle, "I don't think he was a white man with his skin dyed. The colour was too natural for that. He was a little darker than a Chinaman. Of course I don't know the degrees of colour. I have never lived abroad, but the man was not a European. I am quite certain of that."

"Was he a gentleman?"

"No, but he had mixed with them. I should say my first idea was right, and he was a courier. He counted the notes carefully, as though used to dealing with large sums. He had a pocket-book with him, and he put them in that. I couldn't help noticing that it had the Tremaine crest and coat of arms, which I have often seen on Sir Marmaduke's letters here."

The clerk retired, and the three men looked at each other. The lawyer was the first to speak.

"Letters and cheques are forgeries, and the work of the same person. I would stake my professional reputation that I am right."

"I am afraid you are," said Mr. Hurst, grudgingly; "but when Sir Marmaduke comes back we shall be in a pretty mess. The pretender

has had over five thousand pounds of his money from first to last."

"Gentlemen," said Guy Cameron almost solemnly, "you forget the most important point of all. What has become of our missing friend? Where is Sir Marmaduke Tremaine?"

#### CHAPTER XIV.

It was a glorious May afternoon about a week after Sir Marmaduke's visit to Cameron Castle, and before his friends had begun to feel anxious about him. Dulcie Stuart sat alone in the rather dreary little drawing-room of her sister's town house.

Mrs. Linden had gone to a flower show at the Horticultural Gardens, but Dulcie had refused to accompany her; she wanted to be alone, to think over the future. The short absence of which Lord Mervin had told her must be over now. Any day he might present himself in that dull, little side street and ask her for her answer.

And the answer was not ready yet. Dulcie knew that her old romance was dead and faded. After Jack's heartless letter she could but accept her freedom. No one in the world wanted her, except Lord Mervin. He at least loved her; but this golden-haired girl had old-fashioned ideas of honour. Was it right, she asked herself, to take the Earl's warm fervent love when she had nothing to give him but the old grey ashes of her own?

"Lord Mervin, please, Miss."

She looked up. The Earl was standing before her watching her with a grave anxious face. As the youthful untrained page departed he came a step nearer and spoke her name,—

"Dulcie."

She lifted her eyes to his face. Such beautiful limpid eyes, which seemed to reflect the purity of her soul. She said nothing; but the Earl was not discouraged. He led her back to the sofa, and sat down beside her, still holding her hand in his.

"I saw Mrs. Linden alone at the Flower Show, and then I guessed I should find you here. Dulcie I have come for my answer, dear; will you be kind to me?"

"I don't think it would be kind," she answered "to say what you want. Lord Mervin, don't you know that you might do a great deal better than marry a girl who has no love to give you?"

"I don't want to do any better."

"I think," she said wearily, "I should like to tell you everything and let you judge, only it is a long story, and—I am so tired."

Mervin stroked the hand he held caressingly.

"How if I know the story already, Dulcie? What then?"

"It is impossible."

"Will you answer me one question? I have loved you ever since I saw you three years ago, but confess I never even hinted at my hopes until last March."

The face had blushed crimson, but she did not draw away the hand Kenneth had taken in both his own.

"When I was a younger son, and a poor captain in a marching regiment, I had a great friend a year or two younger than myself. We were more intimate than many brothers, and I don't think we had a single secret. Shall I go on, Dulcie?"

"Please."

"When Jack Trelawny—don't start, my darling—told me of his engagement to you I envied him, because he had found someone to love him for himself alone. I had never seen you, but I seemed to know you through Jack's confidence. When the crash came and he had to leave the army I heard that you were parted."

"My mother and his uncle insisted that there should be no engagement," replied Dulcie.

"I would have braved any hardships, suffered any privations with Jack, but I was under age, and I could not stand out against them; besides, he—did not wish it. He told me he must make a home for me first in that new world where he was going, and that when he

had planted his steps firmly on Fortune's ladder he would come back and fetch me. We were both to be quite free, but, Lord Mervin, I am not good at forgetting, and to me it seemed that I was still bound to Jack. I thought myself his plighted wife as surely as though he had written to me by every mail and the day had been fixed for our marriage."

"I know,"—the Earl's voice was as simply earnest as her own,—and when the news came that Penfold had died intestate, and Jack would come in for all his property, I was really glad, Dulcie. I loved you dearly, but I had always regarded my cause as hopeless, for, like you, I thought that old engagement binding. I thought your patient waiting, your long constancy would be rewarded at last."

"Trelawny returned. I called on him. He was out. I tried again and again, only with the same result. He never returned any of my visits, but I wrote and begged him to come and dine with me at the club. I reminded him that in the old days when we were both detriments we had been firm friends, and I said I did not see why our prosperity should change our intimacy."

"And he came?" inquired Dulcie. "Did you find him much altered?"

Lord Mervin looked anywhere but at her face as he answered.

"I had a line from his secretary (I don't boast such a functionary, but if I did I shouldn't let him answer my friends' private notes) to the effect that Mr. Trelawny had no wish to renew old ties."

"How could he?"

"Well, I own I thought it rather ungracious, but there's no doubt he had a bad time of it in Africa, and it may have hardened his heart. Well, I heard something else, Dulcie, no matter how, I learned that he had gone into Hampshire without seeing you, and then it seemed to me I was free to tell you of my love, and to assure you that no wife should ever have been more honoured and cherished than you if only you would share my life. Dulcie, I have loved you so long I seem to understand you as well as I know myself; you think now that Trelawny's dishonourable conduct must be a barrier between us, but instead of that, rightly looked at, it leaves you free to make me happy."

"Would it make you happy?" she asked; "don't you know a great many people would say I had been jilted."

"And what of that?" asked Kenneth with a smile. "My darling, I don't mind what people say so long as they can add that you are going to be my wife."

"You know," she said in her sweet voice, that had always been like music to him, "I always liked you from the first. Just because you had been Jack's friend I felt drawn to you, but if he had remained true to me I could never have married any one else, even if he had come home as poor as he went."

"But his silence sets you free," urged Lord Mervin.

"It is more than silence. I wrote—don't despise me—to congratulate him on his return, and he sent me a note saying we were not likely to meet as he had no wish to renew old ties."

"I should like to horsewhip him," said the Earl, savagely.

"I think my love died then," said Dulcie, "killed at one blow; I saw how poor a thing I had cherished and been true to, and I felt almost ashamed of my own affection. Lord Mervin, it would have hurt me less if he had married someone in Africa, and written to tell me the fates were so much against us that our engagement had been all a mistake."

"It would have been less dishonourable," agreed the Earl.

"Or if he had died out there," went on Dulcie, "and I could think of him as sleeping peacefully beneath an African sky, I shouldn't have felt quite so bad."

"He has cut the last cord that divided us! Dulcie; only come to me, my darling, and I promise you that it shall be my one aim to teach you to forget the past."

"You need not be alarmed," she said, simply,

"nothing could bring back my love for Jack, if he came here to-morrow and said he had changed his mind, it would make no difference."

"I am not afraid," said the Earl, firmly. "I fear nothing in the world, Dulcie, so that you will put your hand in mine, and promise to be my wife."

And there in the sweet spring sunshine she put her hand in his and gave him the promise he asked for.

The warm protecting clasp of his arms, his fervent kisses on her lips and cheeks, seemed to draw her nearer to him, and to drive even the memory of her boy lover farther away.

Poor Dorkie had judged rightly in refusing to let Mrs. Lennox write to his sweetheart. If Dulcie had learned the sad death of her lover, if she had heard how truly and fondly he cherished her to the end, her heart might not have opened to a second love.

It was easy to forget the living man who had put on her such a cruel slight, it would have been well-nigh impossible to forget the dead sweetheart who lay sleeping beneath the blue-gum trees of the south; the boy-lover about whom her hopes and thoughts had clung for so many years of her girlhood.

Yes, Brenda Hazelmere had judged truly; the dying man's selfishness had in it something of the sublime.

When Mrs. Linden came in she had the gratification of hearing the Earl of Mervin was to be her brother-in-law.

Her congratulations were very warm, and she was delighted when Kenneth pleaded for an early wedding.

"I should like to be married next month," he told Mrs. Linden. "I don't believe in long engagements."

Fanny had the trousseau on her mind, so she could not quite agree to this, but before Lord Mervin departed the 18th of July had been fixed for his wedding-day, which would give barely seven weeks in which to procure the bridal outfit of a countess.

"Dulcie, I am delighted," said Fanny, when she was alone with her sister; "I began to fear you would be an old maid."

(To be continued.)

## STRAYED AWAY.

—101—

### CHAPTER XIX.—(continued).

WHEN he said hard words of her he expressed his disappointment and not his feeling.

Fred went to the nest again after a time, and sat there to think it out. He had very bitter thoughts of Percy Falkland, believing, as he did believe, that Percy had wronged the daughter of old Bill West. Fred looked at the matter from his own point of view.

"Suppose it was the other way?" he thought, examining the burning tobacco down into his pipe—"suppose it was a poor man's son and a rich man's girl, how would they like it! They could get the law of us, and the law don't help poor men much. It's hardly a wonder that the poor take the law into their own hands sometimes."

These were dangerous thoughts engendering in the young man's brain—a hatred of Percy and a longing for revenge that only wanted time and opportunity. He went home late that night, and drank heavily on the way.

Fanny would have regretted it much had she seen how that good and honest life was going into wreck through her.

They were waiting up for him at home. The mother and the father were very fond of their son. He was steady and temperate, as a rule, worked hard always, and was careful of his money.

Mrs. Crosby had judged by the colour in his cheek and the light in his eye that he was going on a pleasant errand, and she had a nice little hot supper prepared against his return.

But the father and the mother looked at each

other with some dismay when the heavy and unsteady footstep neared the door. He entered, breathing thickly, soiled, dusty, and altogether unlike the handsome, quiet fellow who went out.

"Sit down, Fred," said Mrs. Crosby, kindly. "You look tired."

"Yes, I am tired; and I've been drinking, mother, that's the truth; and what's more, I shall do it again."

"Surely, no; you will think better of that in the morning."

Fred kicked off his boots, and flung them into a corner.

"I wish there was no morning."

The old carpenter winked at his wife implying that he could manage the lad best, and pushed the tobacco jar towards Fred.

"Have a pipe with me, my boy, while mother gets the supper."

"All right, father." Fred, in his homely way, honoured the commandment, and gave promise that his "days should be long in the land."

"The fact is, I've been put out."

"So I see; but never mind."

"I do mind," said Fred, with a bitter oath, "and I will find her out. She shan't go back to him to be ruined soul and body. I'll see her righted, or I'll settle him. I will by—"

"Hush, Fred, my dear!" and the quiet touch of Mrs. Crosby fell on his shoulder. "Never mind him or her, whoever they may be. You are handsome enough to win any girl worth winning, and brave enough not to care for those who don't want you."

"That's all very well, mother; but I can't think so just now. I have loved that girl all my lifetime, and I cannot help it. When a man's heart is dead set like mine is on her, it's no use to think of talking him out of it."

Mrs. Crosby knew to whom he referred, and was sorry. She had heard the story. The Wests were well known in the Lambeth locality, and every gossip, who thought she knew the truth, enlarged on what she thought for the benefit of her own daughter.

It was useless to reason with Fred. He ate his supper, and he smoked a pipe with his father; but his sullen anger against Percy Falkland did not lessen. Revenge was his last thought at night and his first in the morning.

Daily, for several weeks he lingered about the park, but he never saw Fanny. She knew his hours for work, and was careful not to be in the way when he might be going home.

The summer months wore on, and Fanny's little store of money lessened by degrees. There were no signs of Percy yet. She took in the papers that dealt with engineering work, and found that the Hürse C&S contract was still progressing. Percy, therefore, had not returned.

"The Hürse C&S Railway scheme has been considerably enlarged," said the *Builder*, in one of its notices, "and two years, or possibly more, will be required for its completion. Its progress is rapid, and reflects great credit on Mr. Falkland, junior, who has undertaken the contract for Messrs. Spohr and Lachal."

"Two years, or possibly more." Fanny read that with a grievous sigh. How could she live without his presence!—how exist without his help for two years or more! She counted up her money, and found that it amounted to three-and-fifty pounds, including the sum so generously returned to her by Mrs. Wilson. Three-and-fifty pounds to support her and baby for two years.

Her rent was nine shillings a week, or twenty-three pounds eight shillings a year; and she could not live in humbler apartments, and her rent for two years would amount to forty-six pounds sixteen shillings, leaving six pounds only for food and clothing.

She had her jewellery—her watch, chain, rings, bracelets, and necklace; but though they had cost so much to buy they would realise little when sold—less, if taken to that tomb of genteel poverty the pawnbrokers.

"I must work," she said to herself. "I will not part with his presents except as a last resource. He shall see how true I can be. The money that I have will pay my rent, and I must work to keep myself and baby."



## CHAPTER XX.

EMILY WHITE.

TRUE to her determination Fanny went out next day in search of work. She had the courage to look her destiny fairly in the face, and make the sacrifice required.

And it was not an inconsiderable sacrifice. The change from the luxury of her home with Percy to the necessity of returning to her old life was very trying.

Habit makes us content, and had Fanny never left the workroom she would have grown accustomed to her daily labour, and it would not have seemed irksome to her; but in the past eighteen months of her existence she had learned to look upon the workroom as a thing to be forgotten, never thinking that the day would come when circumstances necessitated her return to it.

She made arrangements for baby's welfare in the event of having to take an outdoor situation in the daytime.

Mrs. Naylor, her landlady, had a large number of children—a dozen, at least, varying in age from six months to four-and-twenty years. One was a quiet little girl of thirteen, known throughout the house as Polly.

She was a baby's nurse by instinct. Her usual position was the doorstep, where she sat hour by hour with an infant Naylor in her arms.

Polly was a little martyr in her way. Some goodness of disposition, a willingness to help, and a sensitiveness that made her endure anything rather than incur an angry word or a blow laid her open to much imposition.

She had two sisters at home, both bigger than herself, and if they were sent out with the infant Naylor they were sure to put it into Polly's arms, or leave it on the doorstep, while they went to play, knowing that Polly would be certain to take it up.

Fanny took compassion on the child, and the child grew wonderfully fond of Fanny's baby; so when Fanny proposed that she should have charge of it Polly quite brightened up with delight.

"Would you like to nurse baby for me?" Fanny asked her, wishing to find out how far the child's disposition might be in consonance with little Alfred's comfort before she spoke to Mrs. Naylor.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I should."

"I should want you to sit up here with him, and keep him amused, and hush him to sleep, you know."

"Yes, ma'am; babies are always good with me."

"And you know how to make sop nice and mix the biscuit powder?"

"Yes, ma'am. You mix it first in a basin, and then put it in a saucepan on the fire; then you put the milk in, and keep on stirring it till it boils all nice and smooth."

"That's right, and do not give it to him too hot."

"No, ma'am. You may be sure I won't."

Fanny was satisfied that the child would do her best. She had the merit of being careful, and there was no fear of her putting baby on the second-floor window sill at the risk of his life.

The arrangement was made with Mrs. Naylor. Eighteenpence a week for Polly's services was the sum settled upon, and then, for the first time in baby's lifetime, Fanny went out, leaving her darling behind her.

She had many a weary journey before work was found. She might have succeeded easily at the City warehouses, but the City was too far from home for one reason, and, for another, Fanny did not care to go where she thought there was a possibility of meeting some of her old acquaintances.

At last she found a place in Brompton—a dressmaker's and milliner's, where hands were wanted. Fanny was a finished milliner.

Her plainest dress, put on for the occasion, was made in a style that looked singular on a young girl applying for needlework.

Fanny could not drop the unconscious pride of bearing that had grown upon her since she

became Percy's wife, and the shopwoman waited most respectfully for her to speak, evidently expecting an order.

"I see by the card in your window that hands are required here," she said, with her polite grace of manner.

"Yes, madam. Do you wish to recommend anyone?"

"I wish to recommend myself. I am thrown upon my own resources for a time, and shall be very glad to undertake some work."

"Have you had any experience?" asked the mistress of the shop in considerable surprise, wondering what strange reverse of fortune could have brought her graceful visitor to such a position.

"Oh, yes. If you will try me, please, I am sure you will be satisfied."

"My young ladies have to work in the house," said the dressmaker, politely. "Would that suit you?"

"I would rather work at home."

The dressmaker shook her head.

"I cannot give anything out. Ours are all private orders, and they have to be done on the instant. My hours are not so long as in most places."

"What are they?"

"From nine to six—sometimes later; but I have indoor hands, who sleep on the premises, and they do the late work."

"I will come," said Fanny, after a little reflection. It occurred to her that she might not find work so near or with such a pleasant person.

"May I ask your terms?"

"I pay from nine to fourteen shillings. It depends on what you do. Are you a good bonnet hand?"

"Yes."

"Dresses and mantles?"

"Yes."

"And do you understand ribbon work, trimming, lace and ruffles?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Have you ever been out before?"

Fanny evaded the question by remaining silent. Her pride would not let her admit the truth. The dressmaker here put the kindest interpretation on her silence, and did not press the question.

Much of Fanny's success in gaining the favour of strangers was due to a winning sweetness of manner that few could resist. The dressmaker, a very sensible and matter-of-fact woman in general, could not help treating Fanny as a superior.

"You may come on trial as soon as you please," she said, after a pause. "I have twelve young ladies upstairs in the long room; but if you object to sitting with them at first I dare say my forewoman will let you share her room. She is a nice creature, and you are sure to like her."

"You are very kind," said Fanny, gratefully.

"I had feared the change would be unpleasant to me, but I see it will not now. I should prefer being with your forewoman."

"I will speak to her."

Then she saw Fanny's wedding-ring outlined distinctly through her kid glove.

"You are married."

"Yes; my husband is away."

The kind face clouded. She looked at Fanny closely, and those truthful brown eyes smiled at her.

The doubt disappeared.

"What is your husband?"

"An engineer."

"And where is he?"

"In Germany just now. He has not sent me any money lately, and I am afraid he will not be able to send any for a long time. That is why I want to work—and I have a baby."

The tender sweetness of the last words melted the dressmaker's heart.

"You can come when you like," she said, "and the sooner the better. I should like to see what you can do."

"Well, then, let me begin at once."

"If you are not tired, you can make half a day. Come upstairs with me."

Fanny went through the shop, and, in obedience to the dressmaker's request, wrote her name and

address in a book on the parlour table. The dressmaker's name—painted in enamel under a glazed fascia over the shop front—was Clarke.

Mrs. Clarke led Fanny upstairs, and opened the door of the long room, to give Fanny a glimpse of the twelve young ladies, whose buzz of conversation and musical laughing murmur in no way interfered with their nimble fingers.

"You do an extensive business," said Fanny, as Mrs. Clarke closed the door on the pretty circle of faces.

"Yes. Mine is all West-end trade—the best prices; that is why we pay so well. I could do with fewer hands, and make larger profits; but it is my rule to employ as many as I can justly—and I think nine hours a day quite long enough for any woman to work. Men do not work more, and they are better able to bear fatigue."

"If all employers were like you," said Fanny, "the life of a needlewoman would not be such a hard one."

"I worked very hard in my young days," sighed Mrs. Clarke; "and I know what it is."

She opened the door of a smaller room, and was about to introduce Fanny to the forewoman, when one of the girls from the shop ran up to inform her that Lady "Somebody" was waiting in her carriage at the door.

"Very well," said Mrs. Clarke, quietly. She had grown accustomed to titles and their owners, and did not run at the sound of one or turn pale at the presence of the other. "Go in there, Mrs. Percy. You will find Miss White, and I will be here presently."

Fanny entered. A pretty face with smooth brown hair was uplifted to meet her, and at the first glance she recognized her old friend and companion, Emily White. Emily threw down her whole lapful of silk trimming and scissors, and ran into Fanny's arms.

"Dear, dear Fanny," she said, kissing her with real affection, "how did you find me out? And how kind of you to come and see me!"

"I found you out by accident," said Fanny, with a very tearful smile of pain and pleasure, "or Providence sent me here. You are to be my forewoman; I have come to work."

"Fanny!"

"Yes, dear, I have." And Fanny took off her bonnet and mantle. "Mrs. Clarke is kind enough to let me show what I can do, and make half a day. I am to be in your room, if you don't mind."

"But, Fanny, is it real?"

"Very real indeed," was the sad reply. And Fanny sat down. "You won't forget, darling, that my name is Mrs. Percy, and you will say nothing about my ever having been to work before!"

"Not a word," said the affectionate girl, kissing her again. "Poor pet, Fanny! was it true, then, after all?"

"You shall hear everything by-and-by." And Fanny gazed with pensive resignation at the sympathetic face looking down upon her. "It is such a long story, Emily, and such a sad one."

## CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE WORK-ROOM.

THE two girls sat quietly side by side, and Emily resumed her work, lifting her head from time to time to look with eyes brimful of affection at the pensive face of her friend. It was the first time they had met for nearly two years.

"Yes, it is a long story," said Fanny, with a sigh; and, putting a piece of Emily's work in her lap, she began mechanically to sew. "I have seen many changes, Emily, since the last time we were together."

"And I remember that so well," observed Miss White, and she sighed too, as if those two years were not without their memories for her. "We were with your brother Will and Fred Crosby, and we went to the Surrey Theatre. What happy girls we were, Fanny! When I look back, I hardly seem to know myself."

"Have you had troubles?"

"No, dear; only such as come to everyone."

I was out of work for a long time, and we were badly off at home."

To be out of work for a long time and badly off at home were common incidents apparently in the history of a work girl, for Emily spoke very quietly, and Fanny heard her without evincing much surprise.

"We think more as we grow older," Emily went on. "I did not mind things then as I do now. I did not see them in the same light, I suppose; but I have seen lately that one cannot always be in a work room, with no hope of a change for the better."

The girl had, unconsciously to herself, begun to ponder dimly on the great social problem—the mission of poor women, and their place in the labour market. She had been from childhood in the large needlework factories, and seen the career of many a worker from the beginning to the end, and she felt sad when she reflected.

"What change can there be?" asked Fanny.

Emily shook her head. The evil was apparent, but the remedy was far distant from her mind.

"Mrs. Clarke is very kind," she said, "and does the best she can for her people; but she has to be like the rest in some things. There's a poor creature in the next room, the mother of a large family, and Mrs. Clarke keeps her here almost out of compassion. The poor thing is so slow—her sight is bad, you see, and her fingers are not so pliant as they used to be—we cannot put her on delicate work."

"Poor creature!"

"Yet she has been a beautiful hand, but she is past it now, though she is hardly forty."

"What can she do when she leaves?"

"Take shirts or flannel work, and the pay is so bad for that. If she were to leave from morning till night she could not make more than fourpence-halfpenny a day."

"And it might have been so with me, may be so with you and many more," thought Fanny. "It is hard indeed. While we are young and quick it is not so bad; but the hand grows stiff, and the sight weakens as we get older."

"I wonder what has become of Fred," said Emily after a pause. There was an involuntary interest in her tone that set Fanny thinking.

"I saw him the other day."

"Did you? Where?"

"In the park. We met by accident. Poor Fred."

"How fond he was of you. I have not seen him for a long time now. Fred never liked me." And she sighed.

"Did you care for him, then?"

"More than he is ever likely to know. Love is a game of cross purposes, Fanny. He was dying for you, and you thought nothing of him. I liked him very much, and he disliked me rather than otherwise."

"That may be fancy."

"No," said Emily, with some sadness in her tone. "The last time we met we spoke about you, and he turned upon me quite savagely. 'Things might have been different,' he said, 'if it had not been for me.' I believe he looked upon me as your evil genius, Fanny. I cried when he was gone; it seemed so unkind of him, and I did not deserve it."

"I should not let it trouble me," said Fanny; "you might do much better, I am sure."

Mrs. White gave her a glance that seemed to ask—"Have you done better?" and Fanny coloured, though there was a little smile on her lips.

"And are you as great a flirt as ever?" Fanny asked, while Emily stitched with the quiet celerity of a practised hand at the endless roll of satin trimming she was putting on a rich dress of heavy material.

Mrs. White shook her head slowly, though the old light of mischief came back to her eyes.

"No. I am not so thoughtless as I used to be. Girls run great risks by going about in the way we used to."

"We may mean no harm," said Fanny. "With us it was innocent fun, but it was an innocent fun that placed us at the mercy of any mean-spirited boaster. What a lot of simpletons we used to have waiting for us."

And Fanny laughed merrily with her friend.

The more pleasant parts of the old life came back with this reunion, and they chatted gaily over many a harmless, though reprehensible frolic.

(To be continued.)

## FAÇETTE.

"You were embarrassed when you proposed to me, George, were you not?" "Yes, I owed over five hundred pounds."

BETTY: "Was George very much cast down after he spoke to your father?" Bess: "Yes; three flights of stairs."

MISS McFLINTER: "I have refused seven offers of marriage since last season." Miss O. Vere: "Quite a sleight-of-hand performer, aren't you?"

"Don't you think that Snobkins' manners are very affected?" "No. What makes them really objectionable is that they're natural."

He: "How well Miss Elderberry carries her age!" She: "But then she has become so accustomed to it, you know."

"How do you know that he has ceased to love you?" "Because he never makes a fuss when I dance with other men."

CLARA: "He has proposed three or four times, and I don't know whether to accept him or not." Mamie: "I would. Suppose he should stop!"

"Mamma," said little Elsie, as the family circle was discussing acquaintances, "I know two men. One is a gentleman, the other is papa."

REDDY: "Why do you smoke continually from morning until night?" Weedy: "It's the only time I get to sleep from night till morning."

MRS. HARBINGERE: "I am sorry to say the tea is all exhausted." Crusty Boarder: "I am not surprised, it has been awfully weak for some time."

"I NEVER forget a joke that I once hear," remarked Borsely. "No," returned Snodgrass, wearily; "and you don't give anyone else a chance to!"

BURGLEN (just acquitted, to his counsel): "I will shortly call and see you at your chambers, sir." Counsel: "Very good; but in the daytime, please."

FARMER HODGE: "Come down out of that apple tree, and I'll give you the best licking you ever had in your life." Johnny: "Not me! I wouldn't come down for two of them."

"Is Letty really as strong-minded as you said?" "Indeed, she is; Why, she can tie the latest sort of necktie without getting her brother to help her."

A BOY once defined conscience as "a thing a gentleman hasn't got who, when a boy finds his purse and gives it back to him, doesn't give the boy sixpence."

LITTLE BOY: "Papa, what is an inventor?" Papa: "He is a man who invents something that everybody else manufactures, and then spends all his money trying to stop them."

WAGSTAFF: "Where's that famous dog of yours that was such a good judge of tramps?" Hopscotch: "I was obliged to give him away. To be frank, when I came home from the races the other night he bit me."

HIS MOTHER: "Charley, I cannot pretend to be pleased with your engagement. I don't think she would make a good wife." Charley: "Of course not. But just think what a lovely fiancée she makes!"

"May I have the pleasure of your company to the opera on Friday night?" said the Advanced Young Woman to the New Young Man. "I should be delighted," replied the timid youth, "if my papa could go as chaperon."

PENDENNIS: "If I had known that you were going to drop in on us so unexpectedly we should have had a more elaborate dinner." Warrington (wrestling with a tough piece of steak): "Don't mention it, old man; but next time I'll be sure to let you know."

SEN: "May I suggest an occasional change in your style of dancing?" He: "Certainly; what change do you desire?" She: "You might step on my right foot now and then; my left foot has had about all I can stand."

"I WOULDN'T swear like that," said the kind-looking old lady, mildly. "Bless your soul, ma'am, you couldn't. It takes years o' cab-drivin' to come anywhere near it," responded the caddy, whose horse was refusing to go.

FIRST EATING-HOUSE KEEPER: "How do you like your new chef?" Second Ditto: "A splendid fellow! Only imagine, he knows how to put down hash on the bill of fare under seventeen different names."

"JONES, why don't you go to work and earn a living?" "My dear Smith, what's the use! I tried it once for a very little while, and no sooner did I earn a shilling than I had to spend it. So I gave it up."

HOSTESS: "Won't you play something for us, Miss Keynote!" Gifted Amateur: "Certainly, if it is your desire. What would you prefer?" Hostess: "Oh, anything, only so it isn't loud enough to interfere with the conversation."

MRS. GADD: "Oh, have you heard the news! Miss De Ledger and her father's book-keeper were secretly married six months ago." Mrs. Gabb: "Dearie me! How did it leak out?" Mrs. Gadd: "Someone overheard them quarrelling."

MRS. WHIPPET: "Mrs. Snippet is almost frantic about her little boy having measles." Mrs. Nippet: "Is he dangerous?" Mrs. Whippet: "No; but four of her near neighbours have new bonnets, and she can't go to church."

SARAH: "Oh, I am so happy." Maggie: "What has happened, dear?" Sarah: "I have just found out my darling Alonzo is colour-blind." Maggie: "Why, what advantage is there in that?" Sarah: "He can't see how stupidly red my nose gets in cold weather."

RAGGED LITTLE LIZZY (outside cookshop): "Wot are yer sniffin' at them savangers for when there's pork chops wot yer kin smell!" Tattered Tom: "Savangers is good enough fer me. I ain't no Vanderbilk or Dook o' Westminster!"

TRAMP: "About a year ago I came by, and you gave me an old waistcoat. You may not know it, madam, but there was a half-sovereign in one of the pockets of that waistcoat." Lady of the House: "How careless of me! Have you brought it back?" Tramp: "Not much! I've come for another waistcoat."

AT Frank's house they had quince jam for supper, but Frankie had been ill, and his mother said to him—"Frank, you cannot have any jam. It will make you sick, and then you might die." Frank took this like a little man until he saw his mother help herself to jam a second time. Then he pushed his plate slowly towards the forbidden dish and said with deliberation—"Well, if you are going to die, I might as well die, too, ma. Gimme some of it."

MR. GRUMPS: "Good-morning. Do you take pictures by the instantaneous process?" Photographer: "Yes, sir." Mr. Grumps: "Well, this is Mrs. Grumps, my wife, you know. I want her picture taken." Photographer: "Certainly. But are you particular about having it instantaneous?" Mr. Grumps: "Of course. When you get things ready, tell her to look pleasant, and then snap off the machine before the expression fades away. You've got to be quicker than lightning."

A SCOTTISH divine was busy in his study composing and rehearsing his sermon for Sunday, and at the same time enjoying a whiff of a fragrant weed, when his studies were rudely interrupted by the appearance of one of his elders, who was a great teetotaler and anti-tobaccoist. "Good-morning, Mr. Morrison," said the reverend doctor, as he offered his visitor a chair; "I hope you are all well at home." "Oh, ay, we're all fine, thank ye. But, man, I'm sair astonished and vexed to see you, a minister, so busy burnin' incense to Satan." "Oh, I see," said the Doctor, between the puffs; "well, if I am, I had no idea he was so near me."



## SOCIETY.

The Queen has sixty pianos at her various residences.

PRINCESS LOUISE is going to Balmoral at Whitstable for three weeks on a visit to the Queen.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are giving a series of dinner parties at St. James's Palace during the season, and they will have two or three small receptions.

THE Queen's special train from Cherbourg to Nice cost £2,000, and from Nice to Darmstadt, £1,500, and from Darmstadt to Flushing, £1,000. It is calculated that from Windsor to Windsor the journey must have cost £10,000.

It is pleasant in every way to learn that the Queen of Denmark, to whom the Princess of Wales is deeply attached, is so much better than there is little fear now that the Princess will feel it necessary to journey to Copenhagen during the season.

THERE is a hope being entertained in certain quarters, the military clubs, that the summer manoeuvres in the New Forest will be witnessed by three Emperors—the Czar, the German Emperor and the Emperor of Austria, though no announcement has been made which justifies such an expectation.

THE Duke of York heard with regret that the *Bacchante*, the ship in which he went round the world with his brother, has been condemned as unfit for further service, and is to be placed in the list of ships for sale. At present the *Bacchante* is employed as an overflow ship for the naval depot at Portsmouth.

THE Queen is taking very great interest in the new church at Crathie, which it is expected will be formally opened during Her Majesty's residence at Balmoral. Princess Louise has given the church a splendid collection of polished marbles and pebbles from the island of Iona, with which the granite pulpit is ornamented. Several of the windows are filled with stained glass, the designs being selected by the Queen, assisted by Princess Louise and Princess Beatrice. The highly ornate pulpit is a gift from "the Court."

THE Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Denmark, who have gone to Stockholm on a visit to the King of Sweden and Norway, will very likely come to England early in July, accompanied by their eldest son, Prince Christian, in which case they are to be the guests of the Prince and Princess of Wales at Marlborough House, and they will visit the Queen at Windsor Castle. The Crown Prince and Crown Princess are to reside in the neighbourhood of Copenhagen (at the château of Charlottenlund) during the absence of the King of Denmark at Wiesbaden and Gmunden.

ON the occasion of a State Ball at Buckingham Palace just forty-three years ago the Queen wore a dress of Indian muslin, embroidered in silver, from Dacca, over a petticoat of watered apple-green silk ornamented with green and silver ribbons and silver blonde. Her Majesty's head-dress was formed of diamonds and feathers. A quadrille was formed, the "Prince Rupert" (Juliano) and the Queen opened the ball with the present Duke of Cambridge, the opposite couple being the late Prince Consort and Princess Mary of Cambridge. The Throne Room was then opened for dancing as well as the Ball Room, and in it was erected a *hautpae* for the Queen and her husband. The invitations exceeded two thousand.

THE Czar and Czarina will spend the spring partly at Tsarskoe Selo and partly at Jelagin, an estate reached by half an hour's drive from St. Petersburg, where the world of fashion of the Russian capital spends the early summer. This is one of the most picturesque spots near St. Petersburg, with a lovely view of the sea and the winding river. Jelagin is wooded on both sides. The Imperial residence is situated on an island, and is not the most healthy of residences, on account of its dampness, but it has now undergone thorough repair and draining, so that it is surmised the Court will stay there some time, possibly till after the accession of the Empress.

## STATISTICS.

In Stuttgart there is a rosebush which covers a space of 230 square feet.

SEVENTY-FOUR per cent. of persons tried by jury are convicted.

THERE are eight white men to one white woman in India.

YORKSHIRE is the county in England which has the greatest railroad mileage. The next is Lancashire.

THE number of men and women in France is more nearly equal than in any other country, there being 1,007 women to 1,000 men. In Switzerland there are 1,064 men to 1,000 women, and in Greece only 933. In Hong-Kong there are only 866 women to 1,000 men.

## GEMS.

INSTRUCTION is to the human intellect what cultivation is to the soil.

TRUE sympathy is always humble; it bows in reverence before sorrow and shrinks from rudely touching the aching heart.

LIFE is a succession of lessons that must be lived to be understood. All is riddle, and the key to one riddle is another riddle. There are as many pillows of illusion as flakes in a snowstorm. We wake from one dream into another dream.

KIND words cost no more than unkind ones. Kind words produce kind actions, not only on the part of those to whom they are addressed, but on the part of those by whom they are employed; and this is not incidentally only, but habitually, in virtue of the principle of association.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**BRAMBERRY TURNOVERS.**—One cup seeded and chopped raisins, one cup sugar, juice of one lemon, one rolled cracker, two tablespoonfuls cold water, salt to taste, and mix thoroughly together. Use a rich or puff paste for the crust, roll out and cut the size of a tansanger, fill one half with the mixture and fold over, pinching the edges together.

**CREAM SALMON.**—Tin salmon steak, one pint of sweet milk, a piece of butter half the size of an egg, salt and pepper to taste. Pour off the oil and remove the skin and bones, put milk and salmon on the stove to heat but not to boil; when it bubbles up put in butter, salt and pepper. Mix a tablespoonful of flour smoothly in water and stir in, being very careful not to break up the fish. Have four hard boiled eggs cut in halves, arrange in a hot dish and pour salmon over them, and serve very hot. Do not let it stand but eat directly. Eggs can be omitted if you choose, but they add very much to the looks of the dish. Eat with baked or boiled potatoes. Dried beef can be used in the same way.

**COCONUT ICE.**—Put six pounds of good crushed lump sugar, a teaspoonful of cream of tartar, and a quart of water into your pan, and boil to 248 degrees by the thermometer; have previously prepared two large cocoanuts peeled and grated; remove the pan from the fire at the above degree, and with the spatula rub some of the sugar against the sides of the pan, and mix till all becomes a creamy white, then add the grated coconut and mix altogether, and pour into an oiled tin frame; let this stand till it sets quite hard and firm; then boil four pounds of the same quality of sugar as named above, and to the same degree of heat; grain it as before, adding one grated coconut and a little cochineal colouring to make it a nice red. Pour this over the previously boiled white, and when all is thoroughly cold cut it into bars with a sharp knife.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

LEAD PENCILS with a paper covering instead of wood are the latest novelty in the line of stationery.

SILK, crêpe, and cotton—the poor always dress in cotton—are practically the only dress fabrics for feminine attire in Japan.

A GERMAN has invented a small house, capable of holding four or five persons, to be used in diving and working in sunken ships, or valuable wreckage of other character.

POLAR BEARS have been known to live in captivity for a great number of years. Two are said to have been in the Zoological Gardens for 23 years and 84 years respectively.

THE parasitic fig, indigenous to the Tropics, is a most extraordinary plant. Its seeds are distributed by birds, and if one drops and lodges in a fruit-tree it will germinate there and send a long root to the ground and draw nourishment through it. It then rapidly spreads over the unfortunate tree and strangles it.

AMONG the interesting novelties in the way of inventions is a ship's buoy. It is arranged to be carried on the deck of the vessel, and so attached that if the ship goes down it records the hour and minute of the disaster. Automatic machinery is set in motion, when the buoy shows a lamp, burns blue lights, rings a bell and fires rockets.

THE starfish kills the oyster by enveloping it closely in its arms, then, placing its mouth to the crevice of the shell, it injects an acid and venomous juice within. The poor oyster, disgusted by the poison, opens his shell to admit water, and so rid himself of it, and thus falls a prey to the destroyer.

THE dangers of ballooning are to be slightly mitigated by the invention of a Frenchman, which provides for the equipment of a cylinder of membrane to the car, so arranged that by the pressure of a button it may be automatically inflated with air in the unfortunate event of the balloon falling into the sea.

THE hands of female mummies found in the tombs of Egypt are literally covered with rings, in many instances there being from two to six on every finger. In some cases these ornaments are composed wholly of gold, but in others, which probably represent all that is left of some poor man's wife or daughter, the rings are brass, glass, or pottery ware.

A TOUCHING old rural custom still prevails in the western parts of France during the harvest season. On the edge of a field bordering the highway a sheaf of grain is left standing to which all the peasants of the village contribute, and which is called "the stranger's sheaf," as it is the property of the first tramp or other homeless wayfarer who may care to carry it away and profit by its price.

THE independence of Burmese women is remarkable. They manage their own affairs, have stalls in the bazaar with which no one interferes, marry when they choose, and divorce their husbands as soon as they please. No veils cover their faces; no melancholy seclusion prevents them from mixing with the male sex. They dance and laugh with their many admirers, and last of all, they smoke, not dainty cigarettes on the sly, but cigars longer than those men use in Europe; cigars a foot long and two inches in circumference, the price about a penny; and they smoke them all day.

A COUNTRY without a newspaper is in these days a curiosity indeed. Andorra is believed to be the only civilized State in the world in which not a single newspaper is published. Andorra is a little Republic—about thirty-six miles long by thirty broad—situated on the south side of the Pyrenees, next the Spanish province of Lerida and the French department of Arles. It is nominally under the protection of France, but its fourteen thousand inhabitants speak the Spanish language. Here, then, is an opportunity for an enterprising journalist. He need not be afraid of duels, for, though firearms are plentiful enough, it is said there is not a single inhabitant who could hit a cow at a hundred yards.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**E. H.**—See answer to "Expectant."  
**BARBER.**—Known only at head quarters.  
**C. B.**—What the Registrar says is correct.  
**TREVOR.**—There is no association of the sort.  
**INQUIRER.**—We have no personal knowledge of it.  
**A. G. D.**—We are unable to trace what you require.  
**SUFFERER.**—You should consult a local medical man.  
**ROOKER.**—You might go as cook or steward if qualified.  
**A. DE S.**—We really never trouble to look for what you mention, so cannot help you.  
**C. S.**—Premier, £5,000; no other office; he is First Lord.

**OLD READER.**—Both Greek and Roman Churches had the same origin.

**EXPECTANT.**—You could enter the Post-office only as a sorter or deliverer.

**INDIGNANT.**—We advise you to state the whole facts of the case to the police.

**O. H.**—British navy is decidedly superior to any other two existing navies.

**FUZELER.**—Fast colours are those which are permanent; which will not fade or run.

**ANXIOUS.**—There is absolutely no demand whatever for shorthand writers in South Africa.

**COMBANT READER.**—We could not undertake the tabulation of the statistics you desire.

**R. P.**—Slag is the skimming off the crucible in the blast furnace where the molten metal boils.

**KATHER.**—We know of nothing better than a tolerably strong solution of powdered borax and water.

**BLISS.**—We suggest that you consult an experienced florist upon the best means to foster them.

**F. B.**—There is a passage in Shakespeare bearing very distant resemblance to your quotation.

**INQUISITIVE.**—Windsor Castle has been used as a royal residence for seven hundred and eighty-four years.

**ERIC.**—When milk is used in tumblers wash them first in cold water, afterwards rinse in hot water.

**TROUBLED.**—Rats may be got rid of by stuffing their runs with dry hay that has been well-seasoned with cayenne pepper.

**L. D.**—Log-rolling means a system of mutual admiration carried on by certain individuals with some special object in view.

**HELMAS.**—Get a pennyworth from chemist, steep it in pint of water, and after washing hair, while it is still wet, rub the solution into it.

**S. C.**—Application requires to be made to the Indian Government; it is only rarely that a situation can be got by one in this country.

**INTERESTED.**—Women nowadays are generally acknowledged to be an inch or two taller, and two or three inches greater in chest development than their grandmothers were.

**JOCK.**—In the heathen mythology Atlas is represented as supporting the globe on his shoulders; an idea which is frequently illustrated in works of art. Hence the figurative term *Atlantean shoulders*.

**MRS.**—Make a good thick lather with a mild soap. Use it when tepid. Apply with a soft flannel, and with a dry soft flannel rub it dry very gently, but give it a polish by the friction.

**REGULAR READER.**—The reason why the regulations for examination of candidates for inspectorships of weights and measures says nothing about times and places of examination is that those are regulated locally.

**WORKED MOTHER.**—It is a very delicate matter to meddle with domestic affairs. We can only advise you to "put up," as you express it, with the troubles which beset you until time shall relieve you of them.

**DELLA.**—It may, if not much worn or faded, be slightly freshened by going over it carefully with a light rubbing of fresh milk, but if wet through the surface it will spoil in place of improve the appearance.

**FRANCES.**—Before flannels are put in the suds they should be thoroughly shaken and the dust washed out from them. They will be less likely to harden in the wash if they receive this bit of preparation.

**ANXIOUS ONE.**—Black shoes and stockings are quite as often worn by little girls at parties and dancing schools as those matching in colour the costume, though it is generally considered more dressey to have the hose and slippers of the same tint as the gown.

**T. T.**—The first great boxing matches were instituted 617 B.C. by Lucius Tarquinius, the fifth King of Rome. They were varied with sham fights, wrestling contests, and other physical exercises. The boxers sometimes fought with gloves in which lead had been sewed.

**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—Picture mouldings are now exceedingly cheap; and there would require to be something very peculiar indeed in yours to make it of any value at all seeing it is old. Coloured articles should never be boiled or scalded, nor should they be smoothed with a very hot iron. Some colours may withstand carbol washing, but not hot ironing.

**BERTRAM.**—You must pay strict attention to your diet, avoiding all greasy soups or greasy food of any description. Very salt articles, rich dishes, or pastry should be abstained from. Regular habits should also be observed.

**D. B.**—The Speaker of the House of Commons has a casting vote; he has not a deliberate vote except in Committee, when he is not in the chair, otherwise he might turn a party advantage into a defeat by voting twice on his own side.

**ANXIOUS MOTHER.**—A child may learn any word that it can understand. There is no limit to its vocabulary except its capability of comprehension. Of course, it is not judicious to crowd the minds of little ones with cumbersome and technical words and phrases.

**IGNORANT IDA.**—It is not only correct but necessary for the girl to answer any communication from her prospective husband's family. It would be exceedingly bad form should she not do so. Indeed all letters of a friendly character imperatively demand a response.

**CHARLIE.**—Sailors in the navy serve for a limited time—five years, frequently less. Soldiers in the army are enlisted to serve for short terms. The apprenticeship in the merchant service is three years. Boys of sixteen or seventeen years of age are taken in preference to landmen.

**PERPLEXED.**—A betrothment is defined to be a mutual promise, engagement, or contract between two parties for a future marriage between the persons betrothed. The Greek Church considered betrothments as binding as weddings, but the Church of Rome regarded them only as promises of marriage.

**F. B.**—There is no enlistment in this country for the Cape Mounted Police; more than enough of men are obtainable in the Colonies, where they offer the advantage to their enlisters of Colonial experience; but you can write if you like to Agent General for Cape, Victoria-street, London, S.W., on the subject.

## TO A SPARROW.

O little bird—singing o'er the way,  
 Singing softly, sweetly, gladly on a spray  
 Of willow gently swinging,  
 I listen to your singing,  
 And "Spring, sweet spring is here," you seem to say.

Ay, spring is here, and soon the fairest dowers  
 Will grace the hills and vales and leafy bowers;  
 Already violets fair,  
 And crocus blossoms rare,  
 Lend their fragrance to the long day's golden hour.

The brooks, awakened from their dreamless slumbers,  
 Sing day and night in gladness, dulcet numbers;  
 The winds are low and sweet,  
 Springing grass beneath my foot;  
 All the valley with its verdure sweetly cumbered.

Ay, fair spring is here again, and happy, very,  
 Seems the bobolink within the garbled old cherry,  
 Where she sings and works away  
 At her nest from day to day—  
 Spring, like olden wine, doth make the heart most merry!

Sing, thou bonny sparrow, sing, for song is meekest  
 Unto her; and thou, O happy swallow, dearest  
 Of all winged things that fly,  
 In your journeys through the sky  
 Sing unto her of your songs the dearest, sweetest.

E. B. L.

**SUSAN.**—Put one half-cup of rice into two quarts of boiling water. Boil rapidly for thirty minutes and drain. Turn into a saucepan with one half a box of shredded cod fish, stir till the fish is thoroughly hot; add a saltspoonful of pepper, break over it two eggs, stir quickly, turn into a hot dish and serve.

**ELIZABETH.**—Incessant practice is indispensable in acquiring a knowledge of stenography. Try your hand at sermons, speeches, and the conversation of your friends; but be careful that your notes are legible, for reading them with facility is quite as necessary as taking them with rapidity.

**HORACE.**—In English literature the Augustan age has been applied to the times of Addison, Steele, Swift, Defoe, and the writers during the reign of Queen Anne. In French literature it has been applied to the latter years of the reign of Louis XIV. The metaphor has no modern application beyond the literature of France and England.

**TEN YEARS' READER.**—What you require is a constant reminder that the habit you are indulging in is objectionable; if, therefore, you dip the tips of your fingers in a solution of quassia every morning after washing great bitterness would be retained by the skin, and every time the finger point approached your lips you would be startled by the unusual taste and recalled to yourself.

**J. H.**—The term "bisextile," as applied to the leap year, was given by Julius Caesar, who, when he reformed the calendar, gave the additional day every four years to February, as being the shortest month, and caused it to be inserted between the 24th and 25th. By the Roman mode of reckoning the 24th of February was called the sixth before the Calends of March, and the intercalary day was therefore named "*die sextus dies*," the second six day, and the year "*bisextile*,"—containing the sixth day.

**ESS.**—According to the Greek tradition, Jupiter, in order to settle the true centre of the earth, sent out two eagles, one from the east and one from the west. They met on the spot on which was erected the Temple of Delphi, and a stone in that centre was called the navel of the earth.

**FANNY.**—To clean white kid slippers, if they are not very much soiled, put a quarter of an ounce of hartshorn into a saucer, dip a bit of clean flannel in it, and then rub it on a piece of white curd soap. Rub the slippers lightly with this preparation, and as each piece of flannel becomes soiled, take a fresh piece and continue rubbing until the slippers look like new ones. Take time to do the work, and do it carefully and neatly.

**D. J.**—Remove skin, &c., pound it up, and put it into a glazed stone jar, set that in a saucepan of hot water, and simmer gently on a clear fire until it liquifies; the fatty substance will rise to the top, while other portions will subside, then pour the fatty portion through a flannel, filter free from the sediment, and put it into small jars or bladder, as you would use it. If you find it too hard soften slightly before the fire when using.

**REYNOLDS.**—We can only advise you to seek some other calling whenever it is probable that it will afford you the same support which you are now enjoying. Great success is not always achieved by those who are in a field of labour of their own selection. Try as they may, they never realize their expectations. It may be that the change which you seek would not prove of advantage to you. Still, nothing can be gained if nothing be ventured, and when the time suggested shall arrive, you will be fully justified in adopting the calling which you prefer.

**LEMMING.**—1. Vinegar can be made as follows: Take apples, pears, or any juicy fruit, crush them well; to two bushels of fruit take four gallons of boiling water and pour over the fruit, and put in a warm place for a week. Strain off impurities as they arise. At the end of that time strain it through a strong thick towel, pressing the pulp. Put the juice in a cask or jar; put in a pint of yeast and a bit of bread. Let the jar be quite full. Put the bung in loosely and throw over it a piece of flannel. Set it in a warm place for a month or six weeks, and bottle. 2. Your writing is very fair.

**JACQUES.**—The Bastille, the state prison and citadel of Paris, was situated at the gate St. Antoine. It had eight very large round towers, and was encircled by a wide ditch twenty-five feet deep. This ditch was surrounded by a high wall, to which was attached a wooden gallery called "the round," accessible by two staircases. The cells were situated in all the towers, the walls of which were at least twelve feet thick, and at the base thirty or forty. The dungeons were situated just below the level of the court-yard, and five below that of the ditch. On its site now stands the column which was erected to the memory of the Patriots of 1789 and 1830.

**PADREME.**—It is possible to construct a very simple and effective fire alarm at a trifling cost. To do this, all that is necessary is a quantity of cord, several small pulleys and some article of metal that will make a great clatter when it falls. The pulleys are placed around the ceiling close to the wall, the ends of the cord are tied together in a knot that will easily slip through the pulleys, and to the cord is fastened a metal plate or whatever object may be selected to make the greatest amount of racket. The moment a blaze reaches the ceiling the cord is burned in two and the plate falls, making quite enough noise to rouse the entire household. It thought best, the cords may cross the middle of the room in addition to being put around the border.

**ALICE.**—Take one pound of sweet almonds, three-fourths of a pound of fine white sugar, and one spoonful of rose-water. Blanch the almonds in boiling water; when stripped of their skins put them into hot-water for five minutes; take them out and dry between two cloths; shave with a small knife into thin slices, and then put them into a slow oven, and keep them there until they are very slightly coloured. Meanwhile melt the sugar, without adding any water; being sure to stir it all the while. When it bubbles up, and is entirely melted, take off the kettle and instantly stir in the hot almonds. Have ready a tin pan or mould, well buttered and slightly warmed. Pour in the nougat, press it thins and flat to the bottom of the pan, and cut it into strips while it is warm. The syrup should be of a bright yellow tint before adding the almonds. Do not cut it while it is hot, but before it gets cold, when it is just lukewarm, and you will have no trouble.

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